The constraints of "feeling free": becoming middle class in Honiara (Solomon Islands)

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the degree of PhD, Social Anthropology, at the University of Edinburgh 1999. It was composed by me and is wholly my own work.

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the emergence of an urban middle class in Honiara, capital of the Solomon Islands in the south-west Pacific. The field research for the thesis took place over a total of 14 months in the Solomon Islands from 1996 to 1998, focusing on the minutiae of quotidian life among members of the middle class.

1990s Honiara was a rapidly growing urban centre, which had drawn its residents from the 60 language groups of the Solomon Islands. The thesis examines how affluent Honiarans were identifying themselves as a discrete group of urbanites with both ethnic and cosmopolitan identities: a middle class. In particular, they constructed nuclear households based on inter-ethnic marriages and friendships, and attempted to distance themselves from their rural and less affluent relatives by their quotidian practices both within and outside households. By focusing on different spheres of everyday life, I explain urbanites' constructions of "home" versus "town", *kastom* ("custom"), ethnicity, appropriate sociability and morality. Their constructions intersected one another in ways that provoked both discord and harmony. These urbanites were ambivalent about their self-made middle class identities, which they summed up in the *Pijin* phrase "*fil fri*" ("to feel free" *or* "feeling free"). They used this to refer to their relative freedom in town while acknowledging that such freedom was often constrained by the demands, obligations and values of ethnicity, kinship, *kastom* and life at "home", which they balanced with their aspirations to secure cosmopolitan "town" life-styles.

Acknowledgments

I conducted pre-fieldwork research at the University of Edinburgh between October 1995 and October 1996, then undertook fieldwork in Honiara for a total of fourteen months between 1996 and 1998. From 1997 to 1999, I wrote the text of the thesis while at the University of Edinburgh. I owe thanks to those who have supported me during all of these periods.

In the Solomon Islands there are many people without whom this research would have not been possible. The acceptance, friendship, assistance, and humour of all of my informants sustained me during and after fieldwork. However, in deference to my promises to retain anonymity, I cannot name them here, and use pseudonyms throughout the text. This said, my friends in the Solomon Islands know who they are, and I hope they realise how grateful I am to all of them.

I would also like to thank Audrey Rusa at the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Honiara for issuing my research permit; Honiara Town Council for further permission to conduct fieldwork; and the Ministry of Home Affairs, Honiara for granting me with temporary residency.

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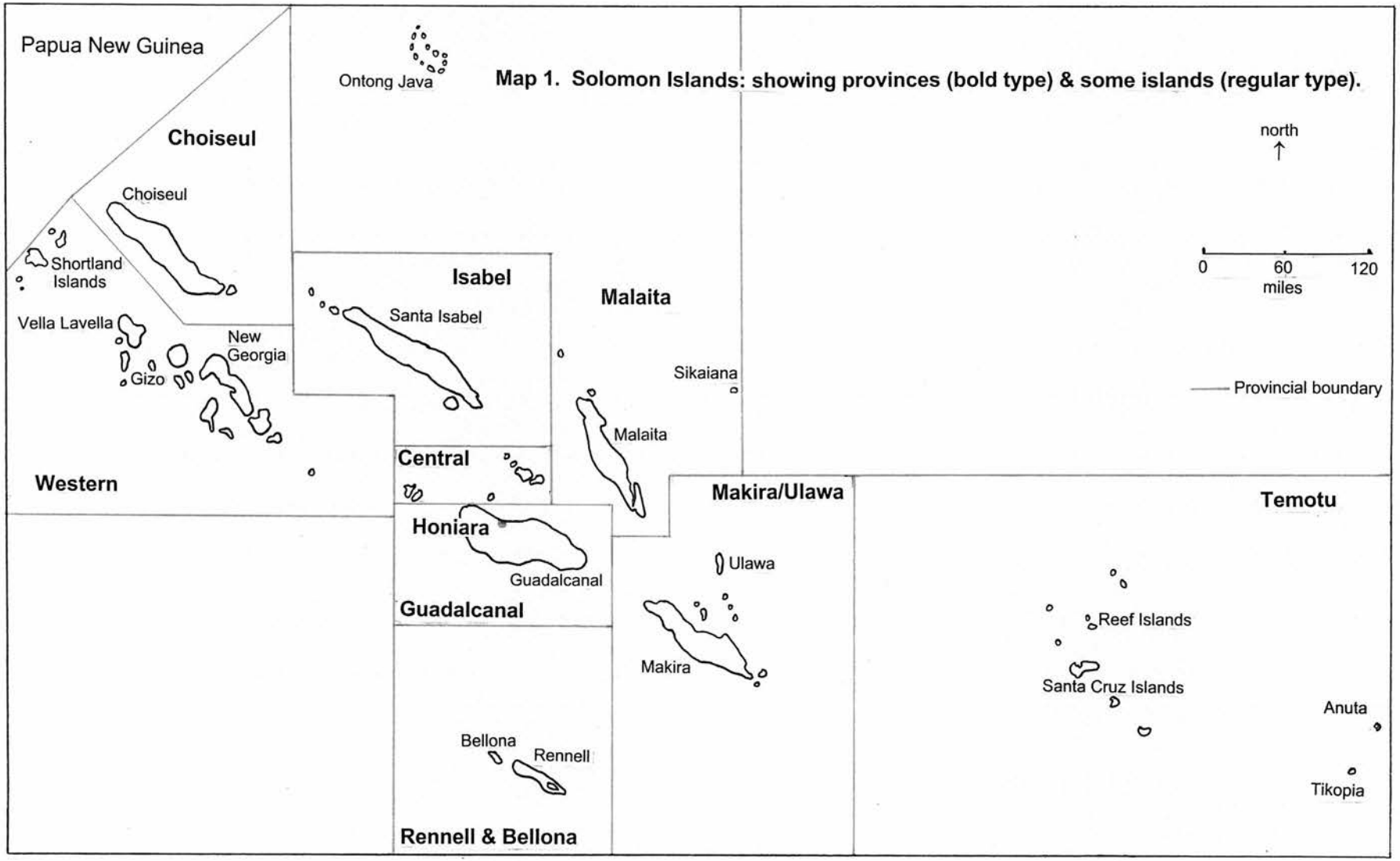
This is a short glossary of some of the Solomon Islands Pidgin (*Pijin*) terms that I have used in the text. *Pijin* spellings are in accordance with, or derived from, those presented in *Wei Fo Raetem Olketa Wod Long Pijin* ("How to write words in *Pijin*"). Honiara: Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) 1995.
Plurals of nouns are indicated by use of the third person pronoun "they" (*olketa, ol*) as plural markers. Or, they are signalled solely by the context of the utterence. They are not formed by the addition of suffixes (hence, I do not refer to *wantoks* or *haoses*).

braedpraes	brideprice
fil fri	to feel free, feeling free
haos	house building
haosgele	house-girl
hom	*lit.* "home": place of ethnic origin
kastom	custom
kwaet	quiet
langguis	vernacular language (rather than *Pijin*)
lokol	local
marit man	married male
marit woman	married female
moden	modern
plei	play, fun
saed	*lit.* "side": a person's consanguinal relatives
taun	town (as opposed to home)
wantok	*lit.* "one talk": member of an ethnic group with whom the speaker expects some form of reciprocity
yang boe	unmarried male
yang gele	unmarried female
waka	work


Papua New Guinea
Ontong Java
Map 1. Solomon Islands: showing provinces (bold type) & some islands (regular type).
north
0
60
120
miles
Provincial boundary
Choiseul
Choiseul
Shortland Islands
Vella Lavella
New Georgia
Gizo
Isabel
Santa Isabel
Malaita
Sikaiana
Malaita
Central
Western
Makira/Ulawa
Temotu
Honiara
Guadalcanal
Guadalcanal
Ulawa
Makira
Reef Islands
Santa Cruz Islands
Anuta
Tikopia
Bellona
Rennell
Rennell & Bellona

S.I. S&M Series G001
Edition 3

Map 2. Honiara: showing area and suburb names.

Printed and Published by Survey and Mapping Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Honiara, Solomon Islands. 1000/6/

Printed and Published by Survey Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Honiara, Solomon Islands. 1000/79

Introduction

This thesis examines the quotidian practices of white-collar workers and their families in Honiara, capital of the Solomon Islands, in the south-west Pacific.[1] Honiara was established in the 1940s, but only metamorphosed from a colonial station into a home for families in the 1970s, just prior to the country's independence from Great Britain in 1978. Therefore, nearly all of my informants were not born in town, but have moved there from rural areas during the last 20 or so years. I demonstrate how these affluent urbanites have removed themselves from attachment to rural life-styles, and have recreated themselves as a discrete middle class group in an ethnically plural setting made up of members of over 60 language groups, which I describe as "ethnic" groups. By focusing on their constructions of domesticity and use of public spheres, I explain the practices that consolidate this move, but also urbanites' ambivalence about their self-made change, and the "freedom" of urban life.

While affluent Honiarans are starting to define themselves as a homogeneous group, to do so they must negotiate the perceived cultural differences between the 60 ethnic groups who live and work side-by-side in town. This is not to say that ethnicity is not highly contextual. As I discuss more fully in Chapter 1, at different times Solomon Islanders categorise themselves and others as belonging to administrative units (provinces), to geographical locations (islands or villages), or to language groups. A central feature of their attempts at self-definition is their desire to create distinctiveness from rural life-styles, which they describe as largely bounded by "custom" (*kastom*). They refer to all things rural as "local" (*lokol*), which is almost always a pejorative used to identify those people who have little knowledge of urban life. In this way, urbanites associate *lokol* and *kastom* life-styles with "home" (*hom*), by which they mean the island, village or province where they feel their ethnic group hails from and remains anchored to. They are involved in redefining themselves by rejecting certain attributes, which they believe that their rural relatives say they ought to possess (see Battaglia 1995*a*: 10).

However, although distancing themselves from *hom,* urbanites maintain a degree of affiliation with the values and obligations of *hom*, and do not totally reject *kastom*. They retain elements of *hom* life-styles that allow them to feel connected to *hom*, while enabling them to engage with the life-styles of "town" (*taun*), which they describe as "modern" (*moden*). To explore how Honiarans define, manipulate and negotiate the dialectic between

[1] "Solomon Islands" is the official title of this nation. For the sake of style, I precede it by the definite article.

hom and *taun* is essentially to examine their management of ethnicity and their construction of emerging middle class identities.

The thesis progresses in a manner that reflects the concerns of Honiarans. As such, the spheres that provide the bare bones of structure and chapter headings are not defined through their spaces, but through the types of relationships that occur within them. Moving from ethnicity and marriage, to the constitution of households and practices in public spheres, I reflect Honiarans' increasing orientation towards one another in town, and their autonomy from home. However, I also show how this trend is interrupted by continuing attachment to home, such that becoming middle class is more a matter of constant negotiation and renegotiation, rather than smooth transition.

In Section 1, I focus on the construction of ethnicity and *kastom* and explain how these are negotiated in marriages. A central theme is a discussion of creolisation, hybridisation and the interplay between morality and ethnicity. Chapter 1 addresses Honiarans' constructions of ethnicity, *kastom* and modernity, and Chapter 2 examines the roles of ethnicity, class and morality in marriage choices and practices.

In Section 2, I consider how Honiarans create households and manage their visits, which highlights their attempts to obtain autonomy from their less affluent and rural relatives. In particular, they emphasise the integrity and independence of urban nuclear families, and use these forms of domesticity to strengthen inter-ethnic friendships and deny the importance of reciprocal ties with rural kin. In Chapter 4, I describe how urban households mobilise themselves for specific events such as birthday parties and fund-raising events. Such visits show how Honiarans include friends and affluent relatives in their gatherings, and exclude those kin who are not of an equally cosmopolitan or affluent standing. I also discuss urban families' visits to their "homes", and describe how these have similar affect. Chapter 5 is a description of informal visits made by individuals, wherein Honiarans mobilise idioms of kinship—such as commensality—to partially withdraw from kinship ties and establish friendships with fellow urbanites. In this section, it begins to become clear that while contentious discussions about ethnicity are foregrounded in private discourse, they are pushed into the background during more public occasions.

Section 3 is a study of urbanites' use of institutions and recreation to further their sense of group identity. In Chapter 6, I describe schools and churches as pivotal arenas wherein affluent Honiarans privilege the desires of themselves and their households over institutions and home. Chapter 7 explores the contention surrounding their visits to casinos and night-clubs, especially in the light of *kastom* and church moral proscriptions, and urbanites' adoption of foreign forms in their attempts to achieve life-styles that they describe

as *moden* ("modern"). This section examines these institutions and recreation sites through the eyes of individuals rather than households, but shows how individual actions are always intertwined with the demands and obligations of households and home. I show how disagreements about work, play and money encapsulate urbanites' ambivalence about their orientation towards themselves and their self-made discrete households.

The body of the thesis draws comparisons between the life-styles of affluent urbanites and those of their less affluent kin. In the Conclusion, I alter focus in order to explain the relationship between the norms and values of members of the middle class and those of the ruling elite. I suggest that despite similar aspirations, members of the elite have broken free from home to such an extent that they can safely valorise *kastom* and stress ethnicity. Rather differently, members of the middle class are betwixt and between, such that the fragility of their situation means that they shun discussions of ethnicity in public, and do not use *kastom* as a means of legitimising their status.

Throughout the thesis, I compare my material to literature stemming from Oceania and beyond, in order to describe how the processes in Honiara are both unique yet similar to those elsewhere. In this way, while much of the strength of the study rests on my description of a novel context, there are certain resonances with work elsewhere, as well as with recent work in the Pacific.

Method and informants

The national territory of the Solomon Islands lies between 5° and 12° South, in the south-west Pacific, within Melanesia.[2] Papua New Guinea is to the north and Vanuatu to the south. As map 1 shows, the Solomon Islands consists of a double chain of 5 large forested islands, interspersed by many smaller islands and atolls, and outliers such as Anuta and Tikopia, 600 miles to the south-east of Honiara. In 1996, some 396,000 people lived in the national territory, which is divided into 9 provinces plus the township of Honiara (Solomon Islands Statistics Office [SISO] 1995*a*: 25: Table 1:2.13 [population projection from 1986 census data]). Provinces are named after their larger islands, or their geographical location: Choiseul, Western, Isabel, Central, Rennell and Bellona, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira/Ulawa, and Temotu.

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[2] "Melanesia" is essentially an arbitrary category created by early explorers, colonisers and anthropologists (Thomas 1989), based on a supposed commonality of "culture", it meant "black islands". The term has been adopted by postcolonial politicians and administrators as an organising principle for trade and political alliances, as well as assertions of generic values. This was famously expounded by Narokobi in his discussions of a "Melanesian Way", which he claims entails "common cultural and spiritual unity" (1989: 100).

Plate 1: Eastern Honiara from the air: had I arrived in daylight, this would have been my first impression of my field-site.

Honiara is a sprawling town on the northern coast of Guadalcanal, which is one of the country's largest islands (see plate 1). Although in 1996 Honiara boasted a growing population of well over 43,000, it remains a "town" legally until Parliament passes the forthcoming City Bill (SISO 1995*a*: 25. Table 1:2.13 [population projection from 1986 census data]).

I spent a total of fourteen months in the Solomon Islands: from October 1996 to October 1997, and from June to August 1998. Over this time, I put myself at the mercy of the alternating dust and mud of Honiara, and made occasional visits to the provinces. On arrival, I stayed in a small guest-house, where I made a friend who introduced me to a family with a spare room. Within two weeks of arriving in Honiara, I had moved in with this family, who provided access to everyday household life in town, and introduced me to their relatives and friends. Later, I broadened my circle by becoming involved in teaching at a nearby school.

It seems important to acknowledge that it was only after I left fieldwork, and sifted through memories and fieldnotes, that patterns and sense began to emerge. In retrospect, I realise that this was partly an artefact of a plural and mobile setting, which initially appeared chaotic, but nonetheless had some underlying logic largely based on concerns with ethnicity

and class. Furthermore, participant observation means striving to obtain a tacit, embodied level of understanding through relationships and slow sustained absorption of sights, sounds, smells and all other sensations. Ability to articulate those may only emerge some time later. In this way, understanding *in* a place and understanding *of* a place are not necessarily coterminous.

The family whom I stayed with lived at Lenggakiki, which is one of Honiara's more pleasant suburbs because it is on a hill with views out to sea across to the islands of Central Province. The house was large: one of those built by the British colonial government for senior administrators. It boasted a large living room, kitchen, two bathrooms, three bedrooms, a veranda and storage rooms. What had been separate servants quarters in the garden were now occupied by another family unconnected to my hosts'. The Solomon Islands government owned the house, and the family stayed there by virtue of the husband's job. He lived there with his wife, three children, his older sister and his wife's younger sister who worked as the domestic helper: the "house-girl" (*haosgele*). As the wife was from Kwara'ae, Malaita and the husband from Choiseul, visitors from each area came to stay for periods between one night and several weeks. Overnight guests were not the only people to come to the house, the wife's friends and relatives would come from elsewhere in town to visit for the day to watch videos, sleep, eat and chat. The husband's friends and relatives often came too, but more often in the evenings and at weekends when he was not at work. The husband's guests also came to watch videos, eat and talk. But unlike the women, they would stay chatting on the veranda into the early hours of the morning.

This constant stream of visitors brought life and chat, which forms the basis of some of my fondest memories of this time. I learned a lot from them, as well as from the more permanent household members. For example, they taught me how to sit for hours either chatting or saying nothing at all; how to make a coconut-leaf broom; how to prepare a *motu* (hot-stone oven); how to feed a young child mashed potato and pawpaw (papaya); and how to go to sleep when instructed. This knowledge of the basics of everyday household practice soon provided me with a firm base from which to explore Honiara.

Through one of the householder's relatives, I found myself helping out at a nearby secondary school, where they were short of English teachers. With no training under my belt, I did the best job that I could, figuring that an untrained teacher was more help to the students than none at all. This unofficial job immediately gave me an identifiable role in town: Honiarans knew me as a teacher *and* anthropologist, and this categorisation made it easier to make friends. Most people whom I worked with were fully aware of what social anthropologists generally do, but were a little confused by one who wanted to study urban

rather than rural life. With my new label as a teacher, but continued insistence that I was an anthropologist, I was soon able to make more contacts throughout town.

Initially, I privileged participant observation, in order to gain a sense of what everyday life was like for these urbanites. This proved fruitful: as I continued to be involved at the school and in the house, and I began to attend parties, churches, and casinos. After a few months, I also started to conduct interviews, often to clarify the points I had glimpsed during my ongoing participant observation, but also to complement them through more structured research, such as collection of genealogies and conducting surveys about household constitution. By following the networks offered to me, I soon obtained a pool of 26 relatively affluent urban households, all of which were connected to one another through kinship, work or friendship, and serve as the mainstay of this study. Like most Honiarans over the age of 20, all of the couples who formed the core of these households had been born outside Honiara, and had moved to town in their adult lives. Because they were scattered across town, I spent a considerable amount of time travelling between houses, schools and recreational sites, in a manner that echoed the movements of my informants.

As a woman, I gained privileged access to intimate details of women's lives, but this does not mean that my fieldwork was confined to them. However, with the exception of formal interviews, any contact I had with men was always in the presence of women. While this may have affected some of the depth of the information I received from men, I do not feel that it overly compromises my description and analysis of men's practices, not least as I found that men were especially open in the context of formal, taped or annotated interviews.

As well as staying in Honiara, I spent a little time in the provinces. On one occasion this was to spend time with a woman who—rather unusually—split her time almost equally between Honiara and Choiseul. At other times I went alone to the provinces to taste rural life. However, I decided against splitting my fieldwork equally into urban and rural periods, because this might have compromised the depth of the study. This thesis is almost entirely based on urban fieldwork, and urbanites' representations of rural life-styles. This said, my brief trips to the provinces did provide valuable insight into rural life, which improved my understanding of urbanites' discourse about rural life-styles. I address some of the constant dialogue about visitors from home in Chapter 3, as well as comments made by urbanites about their own visits home in Chapter 4.

Throughout the thesis, I use pseudonyms and some composite characters to represent my informants. On occasion I have altered ethnicity, and in particularly sensitive cases, I have omitted the names of ethnic groups. Also, I have selected photographs that conceal identities, and do not include many interesting photographs, because they identify informants

too closely. While I understand that in some ways this distorts the information that I present, maintaining anonymity is in deference to the promises I made to friends in Honiara, and in the light of recent (post-fieldwork) eruptions of ethnic violence in the Solomon Islands, is an absolute necessity.[3]

Attempts by anthropologists to "get it right" always involve the possibility of a power differential between anthropologist and anthropologised, as one or other voice may become paramount in the final text. As the collection edited by Clifford and Marcus (1986) has shown, this is more usually that of the anthropologist. "Getting it right" always entails a certain amount of translation and probably getting it wrong. In this way, the findings I present in this thesis are, of course, partially artefacts of my own presence in the milieu. My findings also only represent a snapshot in time, and whether descriptions of the past, present or future, they are situated within the time-span of fieldwork. As such, Honiarans' own descriptions of their practices and of the past occur in a dialectic with mine (see Carrier and Carrier 1991: 220, 221). My use of the present tense, except in some vignettes, must be seen by the reader as framed by my awareness that the processes I describe are those of a certain period in time, and will no doubt change. Furthermore, I use an active voice as much as possible in order to retain agency, and avoid the pitfalls of passive constructions, which tend to remove responsibility for statements and judgements.

A brief history of the Solomon Islands

Although well beyond the realms of oral history, early migrations to and around the Solomon Islands are important because they lay some of the basis for the linguistic and associated ethnic categorisations that Solomon Islanders make about themselves.[4] Archaeologists tend to dispute the origins and spread of Pacific Islanders. However, the current consensus suggests that they began migration from South East Asia during the Great Ice Age of *c.*60,000 BC. By *c.*10,000 BC, settlers had reached the whole of New Guinea, as far as the Solomon Islands. Generally, historians, archaeologists and linguists assume that these settlers were the ancestors of groups who speak Non-Austronesian languages today. Between 2,000 and 1,300 BC a later wave of migration took place, when Austronesian-

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[3] Throughout my fieldwork, I was aware that I continually balanced on a fine line between friend and researcher. I repeatedly reminded people of my role as an anthropologist, in adherence to the *Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth Ethical Guidelines for Good Practice* (1987).

[4] I do not mean to imply that linguistic diversity has caused discrete ethnic identities. In Chapter 1, I explain that Solomon Islanders have adopted idioms—such as language and physical differences—alongside *kastom*, to describe themselves.

speaking Lapita[5] people began to disperse across the Pacific towards the south. This left the Solomon Islands with isolated pockets of Non-Austronesian speakers, interspersed between a majority who spoke Austronesian languages (Bennett 1987; Campbell 1989; Irwin 1992; Frielaender 1987).

Sixteenth century European explorers brought the first reports of the Pacific back to Europe. In 1568, the Spaniard, Alvaro de Mendana, and his crew were the first to land in the Solomon Islands, at the island they called "Santa Isabel". While exploring several of the main islands, they named the archipelago the "Solomon Islands" in their belief that they would find the mythical King Solomon's mines there. After returning home, Mendana set out again in 1595. Subsequent to the failure of this second trip, European exploration was infrequent until the early to mid-nineteenth century when missionaries and traders started to become active in the region.

Mission influences came relatively late to the western Pacific, and have had lasting effects. Mission activity was implicated in pacification, especially of head-hunting raids, which had reached endemic proportions in the western Solomon Islands by the mid-nineteenth century (Bennett 1987: 106-107). Missionaries also brought lasting changes in domestic forms, in particular, they encouraged Pacific Islanders to forgo pre-missionary dwelling arrangements which segregated men and women, and live in houses based on nuclear families. They also encouraged literacy, and emphasised the role of women as housewives (see Jolly and MacIntyre 1989).

In 1845, the Marist (Roman Catholic) Bishop Jean-Baptiste Epalle landed and was killed on San Christobel (now called Makira). His expedition established the first mission contact with what is now the national territory of the Solomon Islands. However, in the face of such blatant hostility, Roman Catholic mission activity was abandoned in 1847, and it took another 50 years before the Roman Catholic missions became established (Laracy 1976: 17). The Melanesian Mission (Anglican) arrived in 1850, and established their first Bishop for Melanesia in 1861: Bishop Patteson, who died in Temotu ten years later (Tippett 1967: 36). The Anglican missions only established a widespread presence after the arrival of the Methodists in 1902, and their agreement in 1904 with the Australian Methodists to allocate the eastern areas of the Solomon Islands to the Anglicans, and the west to the Methodists. Other denominations began their missionary work at slightly later dates: the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM), which later became the South Sea Evangelical Church

[5] Lapita is an archaeological culture named after pottery remnants found at Lapita in New Caledonia. Evidence suggests that it existed between 1600 BC and 200 BC. See Irwin (1992: 33-41) for a description of the debate about the origins, spread and decline of Lapita culture.

(SSEC), began proselytising in 1904 after their founder, Florence Young, had visited in 1900. Members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) arrived in 1914 (Quanchi and Adams 1993: 175). These patterns of mission activity meant that certain denominations became associated with particular areas and ethnic groups: for example, many people in Western Province belong to the United Church, and the Anglican Church of Melanesia has a strong presence in Temotu.

As testament to the success of mission proselytising, most Solomon Islanders profess membership of a Christian Church. The national census of 1986 asked respondents to state their religion and church membership. According to their results, 96% of the national population claimed to belong to one of the 7 main Christian denominations in the country. The Church of Melanesia (CoM) had the most adherents, claiming 33.9% of the population's following. 19.2% of the population said that they belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, while 17.7 % claimed adherence to the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC). 11% and 10% belonged to the United (Wesleyan) Church (UC) and the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) respectively. The remaining 4.3% of the population, who belonged to Christian churches, were either members of the Christian Fellowship or the Jehovah's Witnesses. The rest of the population was divided into "other" denominations (2.9%), "customary Solomon Island" religion (0.3%),[6] Bahai (0.4%), and 0.4% did not state a religion (SISO 1995*a*: 20. Table 1.2.8).

All of my informants claimed to belong to a Christian church, and some of them held good jobs within church administrations. However, as I discuss in Chapter 6, many of them did not attend church regularly, and some did not attend at all. This is one of the practices that distinguishes urbanites from their rural relatives. The latter were more frequent and regular church attendees, not least because of the close, sanctioning gaze of kin and affines.

During the period of missionisation, labour recruiters, traders and plantation operators also had significant impact in the Solomon Islands. Through labour recruitment ("blackbirding"), mass movements of men to plantations in Australia and other Pacific islands between 1860 and 1910 were implicated in the development of Pacific pidgin languages and importation of new virulent diseases, especially gonorrhoea (Bennett 1987: 98). In the mid-nineteenth century, traders became active in the Solomon Islands, and by the late nineteenth century they greatly outnumbered missionaries (British Solomon Islands Protectorate [BSIP] 1968: 90). Traders exchanged iron, beads, tobacco and calico for turtle-

[6] In previous censuses, this categorisation was labelled "pagan". Most of those claiming "customary" religion are Kwaio of Malaita (SISO 1989*b*: 171).

shell, bêche-de-mer and coconut oil. Some of them settled and established small plantations, many of which were taken over by larger companies in the early twentieth century, notably Levers, Burns Philp and the Queensland Malayta Company (BSIP 1968: 91).

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, missionaries, traders and officials from overseas were increasingly marrying Solomon Islanders. Many educated Honiarans still stress this ancestry in order to reinforce their cosmopolitan backgrounds, in a similar manner described by Le Wita among members of the French bourgeoisie (1994: 118-140). By the 1950s, Solomon Islanders became more commonly employed as clergy, teachers and administrators. Men often moved around between islands to do their work, and many married and settled in places that were not their original homes. While it is clear that Solomon Islanders have always been mobile,[7] these employed, migrating individuals were perhaps an embryonic middle class, who valued education and had access to significant economic resources. Many of their descendants grew up to become Honiara's elite and middle class in the 1990s.

Alongside nineteenth century mission and trader activities, colonial powers were busy staking their claims in the Pacific. By the late nineteenth century, Great Britain, Germany, France and Holland had obtained administrative control over most of the Western Pacific region, including Melanesia. In 1893, the British declared the Southern Solomon Islands a British Protectorate, and then obtained the German occupied Northern Solomon Islands by exchanging them for Western Samoa. The Samoan Tripartite Convention in 1899 served to found the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) with the territory as it stands today, although the Protectorate capital was initially at Tulagi on Nggela (Central Province), rather than at Honiara. For the next 43 years, the British ruled through both peaceful and violent means, until their control became weakened with the advent of the Pacific phase of World War II.

A key part of twentieth century history in the Solomon Islands was the impact of some of the fiercest battles in the Pacific War. In 1942, protracted combat took place between United States' and Japanese forces on Guadalcanal and in the surrounding waters. American forces eventually pressed the Japanese northwards, leaving only small pockets of Japanese resistance until the end of the war in 1945. Experiences of the War affected the nature of relationships between coloniser and colonised. Official British reports implied that the Solomon Islanders worked loyally alongside allied forces (BSIP 1949: 32-33). However, those chronicling grass roots responses at that time add that contact with American troops

[7] Chapman (1992) vehemently asserts that Solomon Islanders have always been mobile, in order to refute representations of them as otherwise.

increased Solomon Islanders' disaffection with the hierarchical nature of their relationships with British colonial powers. This contributed to the emergence of Maasina Rule, a locally organised resistance group, which initially began on Malaita, then later spread to other areas.[8] Fifi'i quotes Maasina Rule founder, Nori, describing Malaitan disaffection to District Commissioner Major Sanders in 1945:

> This is our land. This is our island. We have to hold fast to our customs and our demands. We saw the other black people who came here during the war. They were well provided for. They were well educated.... But what about us? We just have to sit on the bare ground. If we talk to a European, we have to stand outside the house and just talk through the door.
> (Fifi'i 1989: 70)

Maasina rule was largely a Malaitan movement and had ceased some 26 years prior to independence, but by building on the disaffection bred by World War II, it also played a part in bringing about independence in 1978. However, British administrators claimed that independence was less a response to this internal pressure than to British foreign policy, which at that time was keen to cast loose many former colonies.[9] Independence was neither fraught nor violent, however, there have been isolated pockets of resistance to incorporation into the nation state. In the 1970s, Western Province was home to a separatist movement, "Breakaway", whose popularity waned some years later. Feinberg (1986) reports that Anutans (in Temotu Province) continued to resist government control after independence, particularly because of disaffection with transport services to the remote island. Keesing (1992) charts the ongoing attempts of highland Kwaio (Malaita) to resist incorporation into the nation-state, which include their refusal to pay taxes.

In the 1990s, no separatist groups had secured independence, and British influence was still obvious, as faded photographs of the Queen adorn the walls of public offices, and her role as figurehead for the Commonwealth affords her high status and respect. English remains the official language, and many Honiarans express a sense of attachment to "England", usually not distinguishing between England and Great Britain. Administrative structures and parliamentary etiquette remain essentially British in form. At the time of my

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[8] The reasons for the emergence of Maasina Rule are complicated, and include the "Bell massacre" on Malaita in 1927, and a subsequent punitive expedition by the British. Participants in Maasina Rule resisted taxation and more general oppression by the British administration. They sought autonomy based on *kastom* values and practices. Burt (1994), Fifi'i (1989), and Keesing (1992) provide ample descriptions of the rise and fall of Maasina Rule.

[9] Discrepancies between colonial and "insider" accounts are, of course, strategic and politically motivated (see Hooper and Huntsman 1990).

fieldwork, a 50 seat parliamentary democracy was in place at a national level, and 9 provincial assemblies, plus the town council of Honiara, governed at local level.[10]

A brief history of Honiara

Honiara's brief history as capital of the country began after fighting in the area during World War II. The Quonset huts still in existence in Honiara in the 1990s are testament to its importance as an American base and airfield, which was won over from Japanese forces. After fighting on Guadalcanal ceased in 1942, British administrators chose Honiara to replace Tulagi as their headquarters, and subsequently as the capital of the British Solomon Island Protectorate. They based their decision on factors that outweighed Tulagi's better harbour. Reasons for the move included the existence of infrastructure left by American troops; Guadalcanal's fertile plains; the space available for building expansion; possible mineral deposits nearby at Gold Ridge; and a relatively dry climate compared to Tulagi. Discussions about the relocation of the capital began in earnest in 1943, after cessation of fighting. However, in the chaotic aftermath of hostilities, the final approval for Honiara to be developed as the capital only came from the High Commission in Suva, Fiji in 1946.[11] It was not until 1948 that the British Government paid compensation to Guadalcanalese landowners for the use of the area for the Protectorate capital.[12]

Once construction was underway, Protectorate administrators set up a Town Planning Committee in 1951, followed by a Town Planning Board in 1954, which had responsibility for specific elements of planning such as zoning. More general policy remained under the control of central government, and Honiara Town Council was inaugurated in 1958 (BSIP 1955: 31; 1959: 63). Those implementing zoning policy were responsible for dividing Honiara's land into civic, commercial, industrial and housing areas. As part of this scheme, the Town Planning Committee ensured that large houses for affluent and prestigious residents were built in prime locations on top of pleasant ridges, whereas lesser officials and labourers were offered housing elsewhere. Because of this, suburbs such as Lenggakiki and Vavaea were built on ridges (see map 2), where senior expatriate officials and their families enjoyed the cooling breezes from the sea, and service from their house-staff. Housing for Solomon Islanders tended to be more cramped, in valleys such as Vura, or by the sea in labour-lines at Kukum. In these ways, Honiara's layout emerged from the

[10] This figure relates to the August 1997 national general election, and represents an increase of two seats from the election in 1993.
[11] BSIP 1944-1946 (BSIP 1/III F79/1 Parts I & II); BSIP 1945 (BSIP 1/III F79/9).
[12] In 1948, the Protectorate Government paid £4,495 to Guadalcanalese landowners, Kakau and Haubata, as compensation for land (BSIP 1948. BSIP 8/I F47/3).

efforts of colonial planners, and visible traces of their work remain today in the spread of the suburbs and the avenues of flame trees along main roads. Early zoning has had a lasting impact on housing patterns, and the fact that Honiarans must move across town for social visits.

From the 1940s until the 1970s, Honiara largely operated as a colonial station: most of its residents were men working temporarily away from home. For example, in 1961 and 1962, men working in Honiara numbered 2,250, but less than 300 of them were living in families (BSIP 1963: 52). As Honiara grew, the proportion of women living in the capital rose, so that in 1970, out of a total of 9,587 Solomon Islanders living in Honiara, 6,362 (66%) were males and 3,225 (34%) were females (SISO 1989*b*: 6. Table II.2). The 1970s and 1980s saw a continual increase in the proportion of women living in Honiara, and the beginning of more settled urban families (Jourdan 1985: 58). Rather than living in town as a short-term measure for obtaining money for specific needs, people began to see it as a place where they could base their households. Workers—ranging from labourers to government officials—started to bring their wives and children to town. By the 1986 census there were more equal numbers of Solomon Island men and women living in Honiara: 16,720 (57%) men and 12,743 (43%) women (SISO 1989*b*: 6. Table II.2). By the 1990s, a generation of people who were born and raised in Honiara was just beginning to mature into adulthood and create another generation of urbanites after them.

Plate 2: Looking over Point Cruz.

Throughout the period of my fieldwork, Honiara's housing continued to spread in order to cope with the demand of a burgeoning population. I saw new houses spring up in between the older ones, and spread inland away from the narrow coastal strip, which is home to Honiara's commercial and administrative centres. This coastal strip bustles: at Point Cruz (see plate 2), urbanites go shopping, while office workers slope away from their desks to visit casinos, or to buy lunch at one of the fast-food cafes in the plaza. Although Honiarans refer to Point Cruz as the centre of town, Chinatown—across the Mataniko River to the east—serves as an alternative commercial and retail centre. Its dusty streets and slatted shops, splattered with red betelnut spittle stains,[13] are reminiscent of a surreal Wild West frontier town. Visitors from the provinces tend to shop in Chinatown, where they trawl the dark wooden shops for affordable household items, gardening tools and fishing implements to take home with them. A few kilometres east of Chinatown is Ranadi, Honiara's main industrial area: a dusty wasteland of containers and factories where stray dogs wander and people search for empty drinks bottles so that they may collect deposit money. A few kilometres further along the same road, Henderson International Airport sits on the site of a World War II airstrip. When I arrived for my first fieldwork stint in 1996, Henderson Airport terminal was a modest timber and concrete building surrounded by a sea of mud. On my return visit in 1998, I arrived to find a shiny new international terminal building and extended runway, funded by aid from the Japanese government.

Honiara's hilly suburbs stretch inland, where a thriving construction industry feeds on the booming population's demand for new houses (see plate 3). Many new houses are dotted between the older ones, while others form new suburbs replacing grassland. Although size and luxury vary enormously, most houses consist of one or more bedrooms, kitchen, living area and veranda. Outside, small flower gardens adorn the laundry area, external kitchen and vegetable patches. Although not showing the extent of recent building, map 2 indicates how suburbs are clearly delineated by their situation and by name, many of which were initially colonial introductions. Honiarans tend to discuss suburbs in terms of the cost of land and housing, which they relate to the pleasantness of their environments: for example, whether the areas have shade and breeze. New suburbs such as hilly, breezy Tasahe boast expensive air-conditioned concrete housing, often lived in through corporate rental agreements and with undeveloped gardens. Older suburbs, above Point Cruz and Chinatown—such as Vavaea, Kola'a and Lenggakiki—provide desirable housing for affluent

[13] "Betelnut" (*bilnat*) is the nut of the areca palm. When chewed along with betel pepperleaf and lime, it has a mild narcotic effect, and causes the chewer to produce copious quantities of bright red saliva, which most people spit out (see Chapter 5).

Honiarans and expatriates. Others, such as Vura, Naha, and Mbokonovera (see plate 4) are more densely packed with smaller self-built houses. Further back from the sea-front, behind the "permanent houses" (*permanen haos*) of the more affluent suburbs, "leaf houses" (*lif haos*) made from timber and sago palm leafs constitute "settlements" and "villages". Beyond them, Honiara gives way to grassy slopes and cassava gardens, which lead up to the forested mountainous interior of Guadalcanal.

Plate 3: Looking inland from Kola'a Ridge.

Plate 4: Mbokonovera with Chinatown beyond.

While these broad classifications provide a useful lexicon for discussing town landscape, Honiarans acknowledge that they reflect easy generalisations rather than reality. Many less affluent and transient people live in settlements to the rear of town, and some live close to relatives in housing enclaves such as Lau Valley in Gilbert Camp: so called because many of its residents hail from the Lau speaking area of Malaita. However, a number of less affluent people live in small houses erected in between the larger ones in the suburbs that Honiarans quickly identify as wealthy. In this way, while generalising discourse about housing areas reflects early colonial zoning, people also acknowledge that small houses jostle with large, in a new heterogeneity of housing types.

Although housing types are mixed-up, wealthy urbanites rarely live close to their relatives. This is largely because their employers provide housing wherever they happen to own it, but also reflects their desire to live in large houses in prestigious suburbs. Honiara's offices provide the highest concentration of paid employment in the country, especially white-collar public service posts.[14] This pulls educated aspiring middle class people into town, and acts as an incentive for them to stay. Because of this, middle class folk are scattered throughout Honiara in roomy houses, and occupy multi-ethnic social arenas, which are not located in one place. Instead, they often travel long distances to socialise with friends who live scattered across town, and their mobility is an important part of urban life-styles and concepts of landscape (see Hannerz 1980, 1992: 206; cf. Jourdan 1985).

Urban landscape is fundamentally different to that of home. Landscape at home is inscribed with meanings, particularly of the past: of *kastom* proscriptions, ancestral sites, and kinship expressed through rights of use and ownership. Landscape in town is lived upon in the present, rather than lived within.[15] Honiarans are not connected to urban landscape in the same way that they are embedded within that of home, and their experiences of town as uncomfortable to live and move about in (because of the lack of shade, mud and dust) reflect their transience there. It is in part this transience that affluent urbanites are trying to negate when they stress their connections to one another, the permanence of their houses, and their successful engagement in the urban milieu.

Solomon Islanders do not think of Honiara as the only *taun* ("town") in the country, but sometimes refer to provincial centres like Gizo and Auki as *taun*. Notions of where should be called *taun*—or its more descriptive version, *big ples* ("big place")—are relative and highly contextual. When a person from Western Province lives in, or visits, Honiara,

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[14] In 1993, out of 29,577 people in regular paid employment in the country, 13,772 of them were based in Honiara (SISO 1995*a*: 82. Table 6.2; SISO 1995*a*: 86. Table 6.5b).

[15] Here I am relying on a definition of landscape as "cultural process", in the manner of Hirsch (1995: 23).

then Honiara is *taun* and the provincial capital Gizo is *hom* ("home"). But when they are in a village near Gizo, then that village is *hom*, Gizo becomes *taun* and Honiara is either "Honiara", or *big ples.* In this thesis, I refer to Honiara as *taun* because I am taking the perspective of settled urbanites. It is important that whether town-dwellers or not, Solomon Islanders seldom—and more usually, never—refer to Honiara as *hom*: a term that they reserve for the place that they identify as their ethnic home. In Chapter 1, and throughout the thesis, I explain more fully how these terms are value laden.

Language

Over 60 Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages are spoken in the Solomon Islands, but Solomon Islands Pidgin (*Pijin*)[16] is the lingua franca, especially in Honiara. Linguists rarely claim to be able to specify the exact number of languages in the country, in acknowledgement of the difficulty of distinguishing between language and dialect.[17] While languages on neighbouring islands are usually substantially different to one another, those on the same island are often mutually intelligible. Also, with missionisation, single languages sometimes became the lingua franca for entire islands. For example, once missionaries on Choiseul had realised the relatedness of neighbouring languages, they adopted *Mbambatana* from the south-west as a lingua franca for their efforts on the rest of the island (Capell 1954: 80). Over recent years, since *Pijin* has emerged as the national lingua franca, only a few older people and those who actively resist incorporation into the national polity—such as highland *Kwaio* in Malaita—do not use it at all. Solomon Islanders distinguish between vernacular "language" (*langguis*) and *Pijin*: generally using the former with fellow speakers and at home; and the latter in the cosmopolitan town environment.

Pijin first emerged among workers in the late 19th century on plantations in Fiji and Australia. It developed alongside the pidgins of Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, which have since diverged and are only mutually intelligible to a limited extent. However, as *Pijin* speakers tend to follow the grammatical structures of their natal languages, *Pijin* is by no means uniform. However, nativisation in town is beginning to eliminate the variation in *Pijin*, and renders it a creole rather than a pidgin (see Jourdan 1985; Keesing 1988). Urban *Pijin* changes more rapidly than that spoken in rural areas, and *Pijin* spoken by the middle class and elite incorporates more English vocabulary than those with less education. As I

[16] Where pidgin is capitalised I refer to a language (for example, Solomon Islands Pidgin), where it is in lower case I describe a category of languages.
[17] Tryon and Hackman (1983) identify 63 languages and many additional dialects, but this figure is in no way conclusive. Linguists disagree about the boundaries between languages and dialects in the Solomon Islands: most estimates lie between 60 and 70. See also Moseley and Asher (1994).

discuss in Chapter 6, English is the official language of government and education. In effect, this leads fluency in English to be connected with status and prestige, and explains its incorporation into the *Pijin* of the elite and middle class. Unlike *Tok Pisin* in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands *Pijin* is not widely written. Most literacy is in English, with only a little in *langguis*, encouraged particularly by bible translation projects, such as those of the American-based Summer Institute of Linguistics.

As well as assimilating English terms into *Pijin*, urbanites also assimilate *Pijin* terms into *langguis*. Urbanites bemoan the dilution of *langguis* by *Pijin*, but many children only know *Pijin*. This reflects the negotiations within inter-ethnic marriages (see Chapter 2); parents' views that *langguis* is easy to learn and can be picked up at a later date by their children; and—more generally—urbanites' valorisation of Honiara's ethnically plural milieu. As Honiarans converse in *Pijin* during most of their everyday activities, I conducted my research almost entirely in *Pijin*, and quote most direct speech in it.

Studying urban Melanesia

Given that affluent Honiarans live in an ethnically plural milieu, wherein they converse in *Pijin* and must move across town to socialise, a focus on urban villages or settlements would neglect the nature of their inter-ethnic relationships that transcend bounded suburbs. Such an approach would also fail to make sense of the physical separation between members of kin groups, which is inextricably connected to middle class mobility. For these reasons I located my research in a network of relationships, rather than within a single area of housing.

Whereas many anthropologists have shifted their focus from rural to urban Melanesia, their earlier affiliations with one cultural group have made it difficult—or perhaps unappealing—for them to engage with a multi-ethnic setting. Of course, this is a generalisation, and I do not want to overstate my case. Several studies of Melanesian towns have emerged over recent years, and some research has always focused on urban environments, notably Levine and Levine's work in Papua New Guinea (1979), and Jourdan's work in the Solomon Islands (1985, 1995*a*, 1995*b*, 1996).[18] Some anthropologists in Melanesia have begun to acknowledge the limitations of studies based on individual ethnic groups, and to look at the complexities of their interplay in towns. Battaglia (1995*b*), Frazer (1985) and Strathern (1975)[19] are examples of studies that focus on individual ethnic groups in town, which include some discussion of inter-ethnic relations. Others have

[18] There has also been an increasing and welcome trend for Melanesians to become Melanesianists (see Hau'ofa 1975; Lederman 1998: 438-439).
[19] I use "Strathern" to refer to Marilyn Strathern, and "A. Strathern" to refer to Andrew Strathern.

successfully shifted their focus from rural areas to ethnically plural urban settings: for example, Errington and Gewertz (in particular, their 1997 publication), and Rosi and Zimmer-Tamokoshi (1993) working in Papua New Guinea.

Gustafsson (1998: 169) is among those who point out that urban settings in Melanesia should make fruitful arenas for the study of ethnicity and novel associations. The gradual shift towards a focus on urban environments is indicative of a general trend in anthropology, which views urban society as no less coherent or interesting than that of villages: whether rural or on the periphery of towns. However, with a few notable exceptions, the sparse nature of studies of urban Melanesia means that although Melanesianists are only beginning to reflect anthropological trends in other regions,[20] perhaps the ongoing focus on rural areas (albeit often through the lens of how rural interfaces with urban) realistically reflects the novelty of urbanisation in Melanesia. However, the notion of urban Melanesia as problematic persists. Jourdan makes a neat summary of the issue:

> Both the scale and the cultural diversity of urban social formations add to the problems of interpretation: no tightly bound units are to be found in the urban milieu, and coherence is at best 'something which is achieved to a higher degree in some areas of meaning and probably by some people vis-à-vis particular others or generally' (Hannerz 1992: 164). This is, of course, true of the so-called traditional village where the myth of homogeneous closure has been successfully attacked in recent years. But the scale of this incoherence turns fieldwork in cities into an anthropologist's methodological and theoretical nightmare, and explains in part the lack of interest that Oceanists have, even today, in urban social formations.
> (Jourdan 1996: 38)

The new interest in urban Melanesia is often associated with attempts to investigate concerns such as "modernisation" and "globalisation". Searches for "modernity" often lead anthropologists to equate modern with urban. In effect, there is no reason to go to an urban setting to study such issues, which are just as pertinent (although perhaps less obvious) in rural settings. In a bizarre twist in their search for some form of "authenticity", some "real" anthropologists now find authentic cultures on the city streets, not in villages. By doing so, they do not mean to negate the importance of *kastom* or "tradition", but rather to approach these as problematic based on an awareness that they are highly contested and in-play with ideas of modernity. The difficulty of following conventional anthropological fieldwork

[20] In a review of urban studies, Low (1996) points to the long tradition of urban studies by anthropologists since the Chicago School in the 1920s, and the Institute of Community Studies, London's programme in the 1950s. Among Africanists, there has been a long-standing tradition of studying urban societies, which dates back to the 1950s.

methods in urban settings perhaps lends them all the more sense of achievement and kudos. Ironically, perhaps these difficulties may eventually provoke a move back to rural fieldsites. In Chapter 1, I address Honiarans' construction of town as "modern" and both antithetical to *and* in a dialectical relationship with "home" and *kastom*.

Class emergence

In my attempts to tackle the urban milieu, I initially worked with householders, teachers and government employees, but as my contacts spread, I soon found that I was also dealing with entrepreneurs and church employees. All constituted a high profile, and well-known group of people. Importantly, they were all connected to one another through various types of relationships: as kin, friends or workmates. My informants were not the conspicuously wealthy elite of the Solomon Islands, and did not quite fall into Hau'ofa's "elite" and "privileged groups", who are linked by their international travel throughout the Pacific (1987: 1-3). Instead, they seemed more akin to the Malaysians described by J. Kahn's discussion of an article in *The New Straits Times* as the "middle class" who are the "Not Quite Theres" of society (1996: 14). As such, middle class Honiarans did hold relatively high status positions, and shared many values and aspirations with members of the ruling classes. For example, they strived to obtain prestigious jobs, relatively high incomes and international travel which enabled them to enjoy affluent life-styles, which included luxurious housing, imported foodstuffs, video players and cars. However, they were aware that their success would be constrained by their educational background and affluence, which precluded them from the avenues of ruling influence. Importantly, the elite and the middle class appeared to value ethnicity and *kastom* rather differently to one another. While the middle class worked towards distancing themselves from *kastom* and overcoming barriers of ethnicity, the elite often stressed the importance of *kastom* and ethnicity as a means of augmenting national sentiment and hence their power. I return to this issue in the thesis Conclusion.

While I loosely refer to my informants as "middle class", I must acknowledge that my informants did *not* refer to themselves in exactly these terms. This does not imply that they were unaware of their situations, and I do not imply a lack of self-consciousness (see Cohen 1994). Reasonably affluent Honiarans often used terms such as "*moden*" and "not *lokol*" to distinguish themselves from those adhering to rural life-styles, while deferring to the elite by explaining that they were the "big men" of Honiara. This thesis offers an exploration of how these affluent Honiarans are becoming a distinct group, whose members

cross-cut salient ethnic categorisations, and draw on both foreign and *kastom* values and practices in order to achieve common life-styles.[21]

I understand class as fluid; emerging across time; and as "a relationship" (Thompson 1963: 11), which is based on people's positioning of themselves vis-à-vis others. Following from the work of writers such as Bourdieu (1984) and Le Wita (1994), I analyse class as predicated on people's attempts to forge group identities by reformulating quotidian practices, life-styles and ideals. In particular, I adopt some of the strategies used by those studying consumption as a means of understanding social stratification. As Miller points out, "arrays and orders of objects were not a secondary manifestation of subjectivities but were more properly conceived as the primary objectification of values and orders" (1994: 298). However, this is not to say that stratification embodied in consumption is unconnected to wider political economy, it is intrinsically linked to control over production and concomitant economic differences between groups (see Carrier and Heyman 1997). Consumption and decoration play both symbolic and instrumental roles: representing achieved status as well as reinforcing group membership. In this way, the emergence of a middle class in Honiara is twofold. First, affluent households attempt to secure certain life-styles. Second, members of these households connect themselves to one another such that they constitute a discrete group.

In this way, wider political and economic forces are, of course, important. However, such an awareness need not imply a Marxist approach to class. Middle class Honiarans are generally affluent by virtue of their jobs and entrepreneurial activities, such affluence enables them to have access to the trappings of a comfortable life-style. However, they are often excluded from the machinery of real political or economic power, which is the reserve of the genuinely wealthy. Nonetheless, as both Hau'ofa (1987) and Keesing (1996) have remarked, affluent urbanites' establishment of difference—especially from rural people—is tantamount to the creation of a marginalised underclass, serving to augment their power and influence within the nation.

Some have addressed the emergence of classes in the Pacific, particularly by focusing upon the development of elite groups (see, for example, Battaglia 1995*b*; Errington and Gewertz 1997; Hau'ofa 1987; Keesing 1996). They generally argue that such groups constitute themselves by distancing from what they claim are traditional life-styles and commitments (see Errington and Gewertz 1997: 334). Also, some have pointed out that

[21] While I agree with Turner's assertion that, "class is only one of several competing modes of group formation and identification" (1984: 60), I take the stance that other modes of group identification (such as ethnicity) are so integral to class formation, that to separate them would mask the complexity of people's interactions.

members of the elite actually use "custom" (*kastom*) to help them maintain their claims to authority. As Hooper and Huntsman explain: "much of this [class] stratification depends on notions of 'culture' and 'tradition' for its legitimacy and continued vitality" (1990: 11).

Errington and Gewertz (1997) describe their informants as the "middle class elite" of Wewak, Papua New Guinea. By engaging with international organisations such as the Rotary Club, the "middle class elite" embrace ideals of generalised service to the community and associated sociality, which helps them to privilege self-centred accumulation over obligations to kin. As such, the Wewak Rotary Club is fundamental to their self-making as sophisticated "elite". Elsewhere, Gewertz and Errington (1996) examine antipathy between behaviours and values deemed to be "modern" and those associated with "tradition", and describe how this antipathy is integral to new forms of stratification. Although Honiarans appear to place more emphasis on the value of inter-ethnic relationships than the Papua New Guineans described by Gewertz and Errington, their formation of a middle class is akin to that of the elite in Wewak. This is because of both its newness and the self-conscious manner in which they construct life-styles at considerable variance to those of their rural relatives, but also because of the ambivalence and tensions it provokes. More particularly, they also create ideals of service, which serve to distinguish themselves from those communities or kin-groups that they purport to serve.

However, while such authors provide penetrating analysis of many of key themes in the emergence of class in Melanesia, they seldom distinguish between the elite and the middle class. As I have already explained, members of the middle class often aspire to elite life-styles, but it is important to reiterate that they feel that they can never quite become members of the elite ruling class. I return to this point more fully in the Conclusion, when I describe how the middle class perceive themselves as excluded from the avenues of power and prestige followed by members of the elite.

Finally, although stratification along class lines is not the necessary outcome of urbanisation, the two are often intertwined. Also, of course, increasing stratification linked to rapid urbanisation is not solely a Melanesian phenomenon.[22] I have already mentioned how Solomon Islanders with relatively high educational achievements are drawn to town for

[22] In particular, work hailing from Africa provides a substantial corpus of literature concerned with the emergence of elite groups in towns and cities. For instance, Oppong (1981) focuses on changes in matrilineal processes in urban Ghana. She describes how affluent, well-educated urban couples, who are descendants of migrants, are more likely to operate as western-style conjugal couples than first generation migrants. J.C. Mitchell's work on urbanisation in South Central Africa shows how cities and ethnicity are integral to the emergence of new forms of stratification, particularly those linked to "social status", in the Weberian sense, as "reflecting life-styles as indexed by occupational roles" (1987: 136). He also suggests that "stabilization" of urban populations is fundamental to the emergence of new forms of stratification, notably proletarianization" (1987: 68-69).

employment. This very pragmatic reason for their engagement with one another augments the emergence of a class identity. Furthermore, urban environments in the Pacific have emerged as part of a historical process involving colonialism and missionisation. Affluent Honiarans' use of postcolonial infrastructure (such as schools) and their valorisation of Christianity in everyday lives, operate in a tension-filled dialectic with perceptions of "home" and "local" norms and values. In this way, implicit throughout the thesis is an awareness of the continuing importance of colonialism and missionisation, and their roles in fostering an ethos of self-reliance and accumulation for urban families.

The importance of potential inter-ethnic conflict

In the following chapter, I discuss Honiarans' constructions of ethnicity, but by way of introduction here, I must mention why ethnicity is of central importance in affluent Honiarans' attempts to establish stability in their everyday lives. As the thesis progresses from a focus on relationships in more private spheres to those in public, there is a marked decline in Honiarans' emphasis on ethnic difference. This can be understood as a response to potential conflict that criticism of members of another ethnic group may provoke. At a few points in Honiara's recent history, publicly-made pejorative comments have resulted in offence being taken, and street-fighting and claims for compensation between ethnic groups.[23] While such violent disagreements were described to me as largely the concern of poor young men, they impact on the middle class by heightening their awareness of the fragility of their inter-ethnic relationships, which form the core of their class identity.

Some five months after I had finished my second fieldwork trip, extreme tensions arose on Guadalcanal. This was between Guadalcanalese and Malaitan settlers, and erupted when a Malaitan security guard was killed at a resort on western Guadalcanal in January 1999. A group of armed Guadalcanalese initially called themselves the "Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army" (GRA), and then renamed themselves the "Isatambu Freedom Fighters" (IFF). Apparently, they were demanding that Malaitans went home, as well as further compensation from the government for the use of Honiara's land. This is despite payments having been made in 1948, but is not at all surprising. Airstrips and public amenities are regularly closed when they become the subjects of claims for additional compensation payments. Houses belonging to Malaitans on eastern Guadalcanal were

[23] Akin discusses the government's payment of SI$20,000 to Malaita in 1989, in compensation for "anti-Malaitan insults written as graffiti on the Honiara market wall" (1996*a*: 29).

burned, and Malaitans evacuated into Honiara.[24] In June 1999, the government declared a state of emergency, and established roadblocks around Honiara to curtail any movements of IFF members. Thousands of Malaitans were reported as fleeing away from Guadalcanal back "home". However, according to press reports and my sources in the Solomon Islands, the tensions of 1999 were largely politically motivated as part of an attempt to overthrow the government. Even if this was the case, the fear that has led thousands to flee Guadalcanal and Honiara must be understood as drastic, and will probably have lasting effect on the urban setting that I describe in this thesis, as well as on the nation's economy. At the end of June 1999, the Honiara Peace Accord was signed, which many hope will bring lasting peace between the IFF and the government, but was under threat from renewed violence in July 1999.[25]

Although these events occurred after my fieldwork, and I have not had access to first-hand information, I include them as they are pertinent to my discussions. In particular, they highlight the fragility and vulnerability of harmonious ethnic pluralism in Honiara, as the potential for extreme conflict is ever present. During fieldwork, I asked a well-educated Honiaran man if he thought that the type of violence—either inter-ethnic or criminal—would ever happen here? I was struck by his reply: "no, it won't, there are no highways here for people to use to escape and hide with guns". While rather obviously omitting the fact that the sea serves as a particularly efficient "highway", his comment also seemed to reflect his hopes for ongoing inter-ethnic harmony, which as I show throughout this thesis, is at the core of middle class life-styles. Not only do the violent events of 1999 serve as a background to the quotidian negotiations that I explore, but they are an example of extreme foregrounding of such concerns. Strathern (1985) explains that it is important to realise that in some situations people desire conflict in order to obtain wealth: in Honiara's case sovereignty over land and concomitant compensation payments. However, while I was conducting fieldwork, it was clear that my informants privileged stability and harmony over conflict, which they feared.

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[24] LiPuma and Melzhoff (1990) make brief mention of similar conflict between Guadalanalese and other ethnic groups during 10th anniversary of independence, when tension centred on settlers from other islands moving to Guadalcanal.

[25] For this information I have relied on correspondence from friends in the Solomon Islands, alongside reports from the World Wide Web-based news service of Radio Australia from February to July 1999 (http://www.abc.net.au/ra/newsdaily/).

The importance of "quietness" and "feeling free"

In urbanites' creation of middle class sociality, two concepts encapsulate their fragile situation: quietness and freedom. Being "quiet" (*kuaet*) is a means of avoiding offence and hence conflict either by disguise or silence. "Freedom", or "feeling free" (*fil fri*), intersects quietness by embodying urbanites' ambivalence about their self-wrought change, and their awareness that the life-style, which they describe as "free", is actually constrained by the demands of home and the need to be "quiet". Quietness is implicated in affluent Honiarans' attempts to avoid offence and conflict between members of different ethnic groups, as well as between themselves and their rural relatives. For instance, if gossiping centres on ethnic differences, then employing the devices of quietness serve to protect people from potentially extreme ethnic rivalry. However, while affluent Honiarans strive to avoid offence between ethnic groups in town, because they are trying to distance themselves from home—to obtain a degree of freedom—a certain, controlled amount of offence to relatives help them to achieve this distance.[26]

Quietness is often used as metaphor for the goodness of a person. Solomon Islanders describe somebody who is not "quiet" (*kuaet*) as a "person who talks too much" (*man save toktok tumas)*. When applied to women, those who are not "quiet" are those who maliciously gossip about others, or chide people to whom they ought to show respect: for example, male affines (see Chapter 3 & Chapter 4). When applied to men, the distinction also refers to propensity to gossip or chide, but more often the latter. Quietness only refers to certain forms of talk: as, for example, a good person should both be "quiet", but also able to "chat" (*stori*) in a friendly manner for hours on end, or show skills of oratory where appropriate. In reality though, *stori* often centres on talking about others, not always in a favourable light (see Chapter 5).

However, there is a subtlety in gossip that helps people to think of themselves as quieter than others might see them, and which people say avoids affront, confrontation and retribution. One of the ways people do this is by seldom using names when talking about others, instead making extensive use of allusion and pronouns. An obvious feature of conversations in *Pijin* is that pronouns are used constantly, often without any explicit or repeated mention of the referent. Instead, people use complex systems of reference-tracking

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[26] This is, interestingly, rather different to the situation in 1970s Port Moresby described by Levine and Levine (1979: 58), wherein migrants living in town send gifts home in fear of sorcery if they do not. It is also at variance to the circumstances in Cameroon described by Rowlands and Warnier (1988) where wealthy urbanites try not to offend their rural relatives for fear of sorcery. Wikan (1990: 43-45) describes a similar norm in Bali, where offence is also avoided for fear of sorcery or other forms of covert violence. In Honiara, only inter-ethnic conflict is truly feared.

to signal subjects and objects.[27] As Keesing (1988) shows, early speakers of Solomon Islands *Pijin* used pronouns in sentence constructions in ways that were strikingly similar to their natal languages (*langguis*). Thus, some speakers marked person and number by using a complex pronominal system, while others frequently omitted pronouns, relying on contextual clarity to convey the subject (1988: 203-205). In all cases, there is a reliance on a manner of conveying meaning other than a repeated mentioning of subject by name. Here though, I am not arguing a point of linguistics *per se*, but merely postulating that the use of allusion and pronouns act as gossiping devices that help speakers avoid using names, and that this serves to lighten the moral import of what is being said.[28] By using pronouns and allusion, those who gossip are more "quiet", are thereby less disrespectful and acting with greater propriety than people who use names explicitly. In addition to their employment of pronouns and allusion, people use humour as a means of lightening the impact of the seriousness of gossip. This, however, does not imply that the matters being discussed are not important, but like the use of pronouns and allusions, humour also serves to protect the reputation of the gossips, even if nobody is present to overhear them.

Pijin is the lingua franca in town, but members of the same linguistic groups often use *langguis* between them. However, it is unusual for each member of an inter-ethnic marriage to speak the language of the other unless they have spent substantial time at each other's homes. Sometimes, they will make efforts to learn a few words, especially so that they will be aware when their affines are chatting about them in *langguis*: known as *tok haed* ("hidden/secret talk"). This can have hilarious results, as speakers accidentally use wildly inappropriate terms. However, alongside their amusement, people are generally extremely tolerant and full of praise for someone who makes the effort to try to learn their *langguis*. For instance, on several occasions I heard a young man from Malaita praise an older woman's knowledge and use of his language. He said that her 'Are'Are was "free from accent", and that she spoke "true/real 'Are'Are" (*tru 'Are 'Are*).

In her discussion of the conversational practices in a Malagasay community, Keenan (1976) demonstrates that the construction of what counts as properly informative is by no means universal. In this way, while most Solomon Islanders would claim that gossiping

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[27] See Jourdan (1985), and Keesing (1988).

[28] This is similar to A. Strathern's description of "veiled speech" in Mount Hagen (1975); to Seidel's discussion of the role, ambiguity, masking and pronominal reference systems (1975); and Keenan's discussion of Malagasay use of allusion in speech-making to avoid direct criticisms and hence augment the prestige of the speech-maker (1974). It is also reminiscent of Weiner's description of Trobriand "hard words", whereby a public statement of the "truth", which may be known to all but is usually kept unsaid, is "extremely dangerous and produces immediate and often violent repercussions" (1984: 167).

about others by using allusion, humour or *tok haed* is not a matter of reluctance to share knowledge, but is wholehearted sharing while obviating the possibility of invoking retribution. Allusion, humour and *tok haed* are techniques that avoid affront, and hence allay the possibility of retribution from any injured parties. This fear of retribution explains the lack of either positive or negative public discourses about ethnic stereotypes. Conversely, the importance of ethnicity in everyday lives is bought in to sharp focus by the amount of discussion about it behind closed doors, where criticism brings few or no sanctions.

Although the emergence of a middle class in Honiara is largely self-wrought, its processes do not preclude emotional dramas, tensions and dilemmas. Throughout this thesis, I show how Honiarans attempt to resolve the tensions that their own desire for change may elicit. For example, inter-ethnic marriages may provoke mild conflict between spouses, and with affines; and decisions to participate in casinos or night-clubs provoke ambivalent feelings about moral rectitude. Central to discussions of urbanisation and the creation of a middle class are urbanites' expressions of regret that they were losing knowledge of their *kastom* and are obtaining distance from rural—*hom* ("home")—life-styles. However, as Lutz points out in her discussion of emotional life among Ifaluk, emotion may imply strength rather than weakness (1998: 65). For urbanites, the trauma of change may ultimately help them to maintain its momentum.

Gewertz and Errington (1991: 108, 124) have shown how Chambri, who have moved to the town of Wewak, view town life as generally freer than that at home. However, opinions about whether this freedom is welcome are divided according to age. While young Chambri see Wewak as providing an environment of desirable freedom (for example, to go to dances and thereby choose their own spouses), older Chambri claim that this freedom threatens the social order. In Honiara, attitudes towards "feeling free" (*fil fri*) in town are similarly polarised and ambivalent, as those who are generally comfortable with high levels of freedom are *simultaneously* wary of it. First, they recognise that freedom is incomplete, because they are straining to break loose from obligations to relatives, yet paradoxically retain a degree of attachment to them. Second, because although there may be fewer prying eyes of relatives in the urban milieu than at home, many say that they feel isolated and fearful of strangers in town.

The second point is important, as visibility and anonymity are linked to views of freedom. As Strathern points out, "Anxiety ... is not so much about the control of behaviour (people's 'freedom') but about how behaviour will appear to others (their 'performance')" (1988: 324). In this way, control of behaviour (freedom) in part relies on beliefs about how that behaviour may appear to others (performance). Many Honiarans claim that their

perceptions of freedom stem directly from the anonymity brought about by town's scale, as they say that it enables certain activities which are less possible at home. For instance, women say that they can go dancing in town, as there are fewer relatives to see them; and men say that they can go to one another's houses to drink without their older relatives chiding them. On the other hand, such freedoms are counterbalanced by certain constraints, and freedom from the gaze of relatives or friends is by no means total. For example, women going to the casinos try to avoid being seen by their relatives and affines of all ages (Chapter 7). On the other hand, anonymity entails serious drawbacks, as victims of domestic violence are unable to rely on their relatives' observation of their beatings, which could encourage their perpetrators to stop (Chapter 3). Finally, freedom to speak is curtailed by notions of quietness, which operate as devices for self-protection, and help to secure the future of an ethnically plural class. In these ways, Honiarans' notion of freedom entails constraints, ambiguity and contradiction as they construct and negotiate the new magnetism of town and their continuing attachment to home. This construction of freedom entails *both* "freedom" and "autonomy", as discussed by Maclean (1994). Following from Simmel, he describes "freedom as the expansionary and volatile form that the self takes when faced with the universe of value created through money"; and explains that "Autonomy is grounded in particular ties to place and people" (1994: 667). While Maclean suggests that freedom and autonomy are contradictory conditions that are resolved by Melanesians, this thesis explores freedom and constraint as complementary elements of the notion of "feeling free".

To conclude, the thesis draws together the strands that I have introduced here. Moving on from the construction of ethnicity in the light of ideas about *kastom* and modernity, I explain how affluent Honiarans constitute their households as distinct from their wider kin networks of home. In turn, I describe how they split away from households to operate in public spheres. In all of these arenas though, middle class Honiarans are both the subjects and objects of the freedom and constraints of home and town.

Section One: Chapter 1
Ethnicity, *kastom* and urban identity

In the Introduction, I mentioned how ethnicity is an important element of Honiarans' everyday lives. In this chapter, I explain Solomon Islanders' constructions of ethnicity, and describe how they link ethnicity to *kastom*. However, while Honiarans place great stress on *kastom* and ethnicity, they also live within an ethnically plural milieu and aspire to "modern" (*moden*) life-styles, which value town above home. They use *kastom* to maintain ideas of ethnic difference, but middle class practices in town are also a reaction against this emphasis on *kastom* and ethnicity. Because of this dynamic, I introduce the concept of hybridisation as a device for understanding the interplay between ethnicity, *kastom* and cosmopolitan identities and life-styles, but describe how hybridisation operates alongside emphasis on ethnic differences.

Although being a member of the urban middle class means rejecting ethnicity and *kastom* to a certain extent, in the latter part of this chapter I explain how it is nonetheless important for parents to inculcate a sense of ethnic identity in their children, for instance, in naming practices. This is complicated by attempts to instil urban, sophisticated identities, not least when children are borne of inter-ethnic marriages. In the second chapter of this section, I explain how ethnic and urban identities play key roles in marital processes, which informs the households dynamics that I discuss in Section 2.

Kastom

Since the early 1980s, a corpus of anthropological literature concerning *kastom* has emerged from the Pacific.[1] Like most Pacific Islanders, Solomon Islanders have a strongly developed and frequently discussed notion of "custom" (*kastom*). They use *kastom* in various ways, but most generally to refer to a reified notion of culture associated with ethnic groups. If asked, most Honiarans claim that *kastom* refers to an immutable set of values and practices that hails from a pre-missionary past. Although they discuss *kastom* in this way, they also claim that more recent innovations constitute *kastom*. For instance, both urban and rural dwellers say that women wearing long fabric skirts and dresses is adherence to *kastom,* but acknowledge that missionaries were the first to introduce this practice. In this way then, while their rhetoric claims that *kastom* hails from the pre-missionary past and is immutable,

[1] For overviews of debates about "custom" in the Pacific, see in particular Jolly & Thomas (1992), Keesing (1989), Lawson (1997), and Tonkinson (1982).

they are simultaneously aware of the more recent changes which constitute *kastom*.[2] Constructions of *kastom* that entail both stasis and change are not necessarily either problematic or self-contradictory. As Toren has suggested in her discussion of the mutability of tradition in Fiji, they rest on a notion of "tradition" as a "cultural category" which is "constituted and made manifest in action and there they find their continuity" (1988: 713). Because of this, it seems that discussion of the coexistence and interrelations between continuity and discontinuity is more crucial than an emphasis on any continuity between present day and pre-contact practices.

Ideas about the constitution of *kastom* are often articulated through language that is overtly moralistic, and may have Christian overtones: as one man explained, "*kastom* is like conscience." Others emphasise the pragmatic constraints of *kastom*, for example, many urban women and girls expressed their extreme dislike for the menstrual seclusion they must practice if visiting parts of Malaita. When this is the case, then urbanites tend to draw disparaging parallels between *kastom* and *lokol* ("local") life-styles.

As many have discussed, some Pacific Islanders use *kastom* as a political tool, to support either local or national identities. Importantly, this is often the reserve of those in positions of power, such as the elite.[3] As I discuss in the thesis Conclusion, this use of *kastom* is met with a certain amount of disdain by middle class Honiarans for whom *kastom* holds only particular appeal in certain spheres of life. When the elite make blatant associations between *kastom* and ethnicity in public spheres in their attempts to inculcate national unity, the middle class reject rather than accept their efforts. For some, *kastom* provides a means of valuable income: Kupiainen (1997) describes how young and old Bellonese men have a keen interest in *kastom* dancing and woodcarving, whether they live in town or at home. He explains that this maintains "ethnic boundaries", and provides valuable "culturally approved" incomes (1997: 28). However, the middle class whom I describe in this thesis are less interested in *kastom* than the Bellonese discussed by Kupiainen, and

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[2] In this way, "authenticity" is not the issue here, as "inventions" or "constructions" of the past are just as salient and have equal affect as those that may be called "real". Hobsbawm makes a distinction between "custom" and "tradition", where the former "dominates so called 'traditional societies'" and is flexible, compared to invariant "tradition" elsewhere (1983: 2-3). Such a distinction makes little sense in the context of the Solomon Islands, where variance and invariance operate in a constant and complex dialectic, which constitutes *kastom*.

[3] In particular, see Babadazan (1988), Keesing (1982), Lawson (1993, 1997), and Norton (1993). Also, this manipulation of "tradition" in order to legitimate a political order has been documented elsewhere. Notably, Ranger (1983) has argued that postcolonial politicians in Africa use colonial constructions of "tradition" to legitimate their claims to authority. Others have shown how Christianity is also used in this way, whether as opposed to *kastom* (Keesing 1989), or in sympathy with it (Burt 1982, 1994).

perceive such efforts as primarily targeted at the small tourist market and largely irrelevant to them.

However, this is not to say that *kastom* and ethnicity are unimportant, in fact, many Honiarans claim that they constitute much of the basis for everyday practices and beliefs. Furthermore, constructions of "traditional" versus "missionised" Melanesia need to be understood as discursive, political strategies embedded in a further—primarily urban—shift away from mission moralities and traditional economics towards a new cultural logic (see Friedman and Carrier 1996; Keesing 1992: 16-17).

Interactions of practices and knowledge associated with *kastom* with those described as *moden* are further complicated by global relationships. In the past, these were largely made up of the colonial and missionary encounter. Colonialism and missionisation brought radical change to the Solomon Islands, although as I have discussed, this does not imply some previous stasis. Of course their impact was a mixture of oppression and local appropriation.[4] Furthermore, this is complicated by the fact that neither colonisers or colonised have ever been internally homogeneous groups. As Stoler claims, many scholars have viewed "the politically constructed dichotomy of colonizer and colonized as a given rather than a historically shifting pair of categories that needs to be explained" (1992: 321).

Ethnicity in practice

It did not take long in Honiara before I became aware of people's constant fascination with the origins of others. The first thing that people always asked about others was: "*man blo/lo wea*?", which meant: "where's that person from?" If Honiarans met face to face, they did not have to ask, but knew from indirect cues. Once, at a football match, the Malaitans I was with started chatting to people sitting next to us. I asked my friends, "*man blo wea*?" One of them replied, "*Man blo East Kwara'ae, Mala*" ("a person from East Kwara'ae, Malaita"). I asked them if he was one of their relatives? They said, "no". I asked if they knew him already? Again, they replied, "no". Confused, I asked how they knew that he was from Malaita before they had even started talking to him. My friends gave a rather curt reply: "How do you know if someone is from England, Australia or America?" I felt both punished and enlightened, realising that—of course—Honiarans use many cues to decide where someone is from, including the style of their *Pijin*; the sound of their *langguis*; and their physical looks and comportment. They usually mention physical looks as the most important of these:

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[4] See Thomas (1994: 63) who mentions this dynamic, and Errington and Gewertz for a particularly sensitive description of how Karavarans in Papua New Guinea interacted with Europeans through "acts of resistance, differentiation, and sometimes, qualified emulation" (1995: 6).

informants said that people from different areas of the Solomon Islands look different to one another, especially with regard to their skin tone and physical build.[5] For instance, a Solomon Islander could look across the street at someone they had never met before and say, "*blo West*" ("from Western Province"). If pressed, they would explain that they knew this because of the stranger's very dark skin, and particular build. As well as physical appearance, accessories play their part too, although clothing is not generally a key to ethnicity, baggage is. For example, a woman carrying a load on her head is recognisable as "*blo Guale*" ("from Guadalcanal") while somebody with a string bag slung from their forehead is clearly "*blo Choiseul*" ("from Choiseul").

While physical appearance aids identification, Honiarans claim that ethnicity is largely constituted by descent, and consolidated by *kastom* practices. While ethnicity *is* also imparted through practice, constructions of blood-ties and descent are at its core. In this way, even children fostered ("adopted": *adoptem*) into a family from another ethnic group are always identified according to the ethnicity of their birth parents, and it may take several generations before an outsider's ethnic origin is no longer emphasised by his or her descendants. Very often, as I mentioned in the Introduction, Honiarans with foreign ancestry stress it in order to emphasise their cosmopolitan status in the 1990s.

I use the terms "ethnicity" and "ethnic group" as "that method of classifying people (both self and other) that uses origin (socially constructed) as its primary reference " (Levine 1999: 168). In the context of Honiara, "ethnicity" refers to groups who claim that they are unified by virtue of descent, language and *kastom*, are connected to particular places, and for whom membership is primarily afforded by descent (I discuss this below). Levine asserts: "What is banal and tenacious about ethnicity is the recurring argument about whether ethnic identities are essentially primordial or situational" (1999: 166), and I do not become embroiled in this debate. In an attempt to provide a model of ethnicity which enables anthropology to move forward in its study of ethnicity, Levine also proposes an approach to ethnicity that examines both the "classifying" and the "classifications" that people make (1999: 169). Following Levine, this thesis addresses how Honiarans constitute and contest their identities through the minutiae of everyday life, and explores the interrelationship between class and ethnicity.

I do not mean to reify the content, membership or boundaries of ethnic groups, nor to imply that the notion of boundaries is not problematic. This is particularly important given

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[5] Such distinctions made according to physical appearance have been documented elsewhere in Melanesia. See, for example, Nash and Ogan (1990) who describe how Bougainvilleans used skin colour as a "focal symbol" for their ethnic identity. They explain how this focus may have stemmed from colonial representations, but is employed effectively for present-day political ends.

the volume of transactions of knowledge, practices, as well as goods and people, between groups in Melanesia. Boundaries are constantly permeated by "transactional flows" (A. Strathern & Sturzenhofecker 1994: 5).[6] However, it is important that Solomon Islanders *themselves* constantly refer to one another's ethnic backgrounds as justifications for actions and beliefs, and that they name themselves as belonging to certain ethnic groups. This parallels Errington and Gewertz's description of Papua New Guinea: "These were—and contra Strathern (1988: 318)—societies that emphatically named themselves" (1996: 124 note 4). Additionally, while ethnic groups are often associated with territory, Honiarans are deterritorialised, or rather reterritorialised, but maintain strong ethnic affiliations.

With the exception of some of the English-speaking elite, most Solomon Islanders do not use the term "ethnic". Instead, there are two types of ways to describe identity. Solomon Islanders use *wantok* (*lit.* "one language") to refer to people of the same "ethnic (home) origin" (Strathern 1975: 293-294), or refer directly to the name of a province, village, or language. Whether they decide to use the term *wantok*, or to describe affiliation by other means, is generally based on the context and connotations of their relationships with others. Importantly, most Solomon Islanders reserve the term "*wantok*" to describe relationships that are imbued with the expectation of reciprocity. On the other hand, more general references to ethnicity do not necessarily include this connotation.

When away from home, especially when in town, Solomon Islanders tend to assume a bond of generalised mutual support and safety among members of the same ethnic group: they refer to this as the *wantok sistem* ("wantok system"), or occasionally as *wantok bisnis* ("wantok business"). Support for *wantok* includes expecting cheaper taxi fares and safe passage from taxi drivers who are *wantok*, and expecting *wantok* to help find employment. The *wantok* system is a pervasive means of mobilising people, but by doing so causes allegations of favouritism which people argue is counter to an ideal of "modern" meritocracy, which I discuss more fully in Chapter 6.

Jourdan (1996: 43) claims that women are less attached to "tradition" than men and are more likely to make contact outside their *wantok* group. While this may be the case for less prestigious or affluent urbanites, it is not necessarily true for the middle class. Use of the *wantok* system must be understood in the context of opportunities for obtaining prestige and status in town. It seems that both men and women do use the *wantok* system as devices for self-promotion, but in subtly different ways. Men use a public form of the *wantok* system in order to find employment and establish formal associations of *wantok*. On the other hand, women tend to use the *wantok* system to ensure their safety, for instance, by asking *wantok*

[6] See also Harrison (1993).

to walk with them through town. They also use the system to help them to accrue prestige within informal settings, such as to help them make money from small enterprise. While women do make use of the *wantok* system to secure employment, this is less common than their mobilisation of *wantok* relationships to secure relations of reciprocity in domestic and private environments.

The operation of the *wantok sistem* is fraught with moral dilemmas, and the term *wantok* is generally only employed in situations where specific gains and relationships of reciprocity are hoped for. While groups of *wantok* are a particular form of ethnic groups, ethnic groups are not always discussed in the same manner as *wantok*. Furthermore, contra Levine (1979: 72), middle class Honiarans do not describe their unrelated friends as *wantok*, probably because their attempts to be cosmopolitan mean that they relish their inter-ethnic connections, and do not want to imbue them with the qualities of kin relationships. For these reasons, I reserve the term *wantok* for those contexts where Solomon Islanders themselves employ it in their descriptions of reciprocal relationships with members of their own ethnic groups. The term "ethnic group" encompasses *wantok* relationships, but also other forms of classifications based on origin.

As well as using terminology that refers directly to language, island or province, many urbanites use a lexicon of slang labels, sometimes in a derogatory manner. Such terms immediately identify a person's ethnic origins, and convey a plethora of connotations, such as morality, ability to work hard, or magical powers. Often, they are commonly heard words or phrases from a particular *langguis*, which are generalised to refer to people from an entire island or province.

For example, many Honiarans use the following terms for members of broadly defined ethnic groups. Most terms are derived from *langguis* words of the group being referred to:

a'u	Person from Rennell/Bellona. Derived from *langguis* for "to come"
tio	Person from Western Province. From *langguis* for "person/you"
soa	Person from Tikopia. From *langguis* for "friend/you"
namba seven	Person from Malaita. From Malaitans' reputation for using axes shaped like the number 7
lanowna	Person from Guadalcanal. From *Pijin* for "landowner"
ghema	Person from Santa Isabel. From *langguis* for "person/you"
bo	Person from Choiseul. From *Mbambatana langguis* for "friend/man"
machu	Person from Marovo lagoon. From *Marovo langguis* for "person"
kula	Person from Gela. From *langguis* for "person/friend"
waiko	Person from Makira. From *langguis* for "friend"
qisi	Person from Temotu or the Reef Islands (see below)

Despite the fact that most of these words are in relatively frequent use, not every Honiaran knows or uses all of them. Nor is there agreement about their application, origin or meanings. For example, a woman from Lau, Malaita explained that people used *Qisi* for People from Temotu "because qisi means hair which will not grow. It's a Lau language word." On the other hand, a woman from Tikopia claimed that *Qisi* means people from the Reef Islands in particular, which is part of Temotu province and "comes from their *langguis* for friend."

Ethnic categorisations may at times reflect those made by colonial and postcolonial administrators, but at others reflects more tangible connectivity, such as kinship. Importantly, Honiarans associate ethnic groups with practices deemed to be *kastom*. For instance, discrete language is often concomitant with certain practices such as brideprice (*braedpraes*)[7] exchanges, and descent and inheritance rules. People from the 'Are'Are speaking area of Malaita generally make brideprice payments in three distinct stages, while to their north, Kwaio who follow *kastom,* use a different arrangement of shell money to pay brideprice in one stage (Keesing 1992: 28). More profound differences occur between

[7] I prefer the term "brideprice" to "bride wealth", especially as "brideprice" is morphologically closer to the *Pijin* term *braedpraes*. I do not mean to obscure the debate about the complex nature of such exchanges, nor the commodification that many say is at the core of them (Filer 1985).

islands. For example, all Malaitan groups practice patrilineal descent and inheritance, and conventionally pay some form of brideprice.[8] On Santa Isabel, people generally adhere to patterns of matrilineal descent and inheritance, and do not make brideprice payments. On the other hand, people from Guadalcanal also practice matrilineal inheritance and descent, but do pay brideprice using a slightly different type of shell money from all Malaitan groups. Although these practices have no doubt informed and shaped one another, Solomon Islanders stress the existence of such differences, and are keen to discuss and learn about those of other groups. They often portray and essentialise ethnic groups according to various attributes. These may be positive, such as ability to work hard, or be morally upright. But in private, they may ascribe negative qualities such as tendency to fight, use harsh words (*tok had*), or be promiscuous. Alternatively, people may portray a quality as positive when in public, but negative when in private. For instance, in public settings, they may say that another ethnic group's propensity to work hard is a good thing, but behind closed doors will claim that this means that members of that group are too grasping and selfish.

Although Honiarans rely on *kastom* practices as a means of defining ethnicity, they say that descent is paramount, and is evidenced by physical appearances. At first glance this appears to run counter to arguments that ethnicity among Pacific Islanders is constituted according to a "Lamarkian model" (Linnekin and Poyer 1990). This model asserts that that "shared identity comes from sharing food, water, land, spirits, knowledge, work, and social activities", such that "people are not simply born into social groups, but may—in fact, must—become members through their actions" (1990: 8). While practice and social relationships are important elements in Honiarans' identity formation, they are not solely constitutive of it. Honiarans' discussions of ethnicity seem akin to Linnekin and Poyer's description of a "Mendelian model" of ethnicity, which "sees individual identity as determined more or less irrevocably by descent, and predictable from the facts of parentage" (1990: 8).

However, I do not deny that practice is important in identity formation, but it seems that Honiarans conceive of practice as augmenting identity that is they say is given by a person's descent. While descent is itself constituted by actions of parents and ancestors, nonetheless, Honiarans do conceive of descent as a given: such that a people can never "become" of an ethnic group other than that of their birth parents, nor that a person can belong to two ethnic groups at once, or in a lifetime, other than those which are nested

[8] However, certain churches prohibit or limit their members' involvement in brideprice exchanges. Notably, the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) prohibits brideprice and the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC) places a limit of five *tafuli'ae* (ten strings of red-shell disc money, each a fathom long) on brideprice payments.

within one another (for example, that a person may be both 'Are'Are *and* Malaitan because 'Are'Are is a linguistic group within Malaita).

A person *may* be identified as having become a member of another ethnic group, but I would suggest this is primarily intended as a flattering joke. For instance, when—in the Introduction—a man described a Tikopian woman as speaking "*tru 'Are'Are*" ("true/real 'Are'Are"), he was not implying that he perceived her as "true" 'Are'Are. Similarly, when women told me that I was a "Solomon Islander now", because I knew how to comport myself in front of them (see Chapter 3), I do not believe that the implication was that they saw me as a Solomon Islander. Although such joking references could be read as conferring identity, the women's joking praised my attempts to act appropriately in those circumstances, and should be read as a marker of acceptance rather than incorporation into a new group. Such comments remind me of Geertz's observations on Bali, that "to be teased is to be accepted" (1973: 416). This seems to be rather different to the situations described elsewhere in the Pacific and beyond, whereby identity is constructed almost entirely through practice or performance (in particular, see Astuti 1995; A. Strathern 1973).

So, how can we explain Honiarans' emphasis on ethnicity as a given, when compared to other studies of Pacific identity, which indicate that performance and practice are paramount? Perhaps the orientation of middle class Honiarans towards a Mendelian model is linked to their particular economic, political and social circumstances. Many have migrated frequently; many were born in Honiara rather than at home; all interact with those whom they say are not of the same ethnic group; and many reject aspects of *kastom*. Without the rootedness of place and *kastom* practices, if ethnicity remains important—as indeed it does—then it needs to be defined in novel ways.[9] This apparently paradoxical emphasis on descent expresses tensions and problems involved in losing *lokol* identities in order to become middle class. While Honiarans' constructions of ethnicity are becoming increasingly based on a Mendelian model, a Lamarkian model of shifting identities underlies the formation of the middle class, whereby people certainly obtain their class affiliation through their practices.[10]

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[9] Roosens describes how migrants are particularly likely to emphasise "the family-origin metaphor" as it "may be a useful complementary tool to capture specific phenomena, which are difficult or impossible to catch with a boundary [Barthian] metaphor" (1994: 86). See Barth (1969).

[10] My argument is not so much about *why* ethnicity is core to urban identities, but concerns *how* those identities are constructed, and in what circumstances they are emphasised (cf. Banks 1996: 29-39).

The 1986 census attempted to enumerate natal language of respondents, but soon found this problematic, and returned to the arrangement in previous years whereby respondents were asked to name their provinces of birth,[11] which were compared to residence on the night of the census. In addition, for the first time, census organisers asked where people were living at certain key points (such as independence in 1978) in order to obtain more detailed information on patterns of migration, which show, for example, a correlation between level of education and propensity to migrate.

The census provides useful data for understanding the ethnic pluralism of Honiara's population, although only at one level. As I discussed above, Honiarans see themselves as from provinces, language groups and particular villages, and use the term *wantok* in particular situations. In this way then, enumerators' questions about provinces of birth accessed only one layer of identities—those at the level of administrative units—and did not unpack the decisions about ethnic identity that people inevitably have to make, for example, if their parents are each from different ethnic groups. A place of birth does not always indicate a person's sense of ethnic affiliation. Nonetheless, the census data reveals the ethnic pluralism of Honiara, albeit in rather simplified form.

Table 1: 1986 Census figures showing provinces of birth of Honiara's population.

	% of total Solomon Islands population:	*Population of Honiara by province of birth:*	*% of population of Honiara by province of birth:*
Malaita:	28.06%	10655	37.36%
Guadalcanal:	17.47%	1935	6.78%
Central:	6.47%	1450	5.08%
Isabel:	5.13%	1056	3.70%
Makira:	7.64%	960	3.37%
Western:	19.37%	3336	11.70%
Temotu:	5.18%	1074	3.76%
Honiara:	10.66%	8053	28.28%
Total population of Honiara:		28519[12]	

(Source: SISO 1989*b*: 51. Table IV.2)

[11] Only seven provinces plus Honiara are listed in the 1986 census, as Choiseul and Rennell and Bellona Provinces only came into existence since that date with the subdivision of Western and Central provinces in 1991 and 1993, respectively.

[12] This figure is slightly less than that which I mentioned in the introduction. This is because it excludes non-citizens, and those who did not specify province of birth.

The figures show that while only 28.6% of the total Solomon Islands' population was born in Malaita Province, 37.36% of Honiara's population was born there. There are several reasons for this prevalence of Malaitans in Honiara. First, Malaita is only a few hours journey from Honiara by ship, which means that people find it relatively easy to migrate temporarily to and from the capital. Second, Malaitans stress how crowded their main island is, saying that many people want to leave because the land is overcrowded and overexploited. Third, there is a relative shortage of paid employment for the large population on Malaita, where there are few plantations and few industries. Fourth, Frazer (1985) has pointed out that young Malaitan men say that they want to go "*wakabaot*" ("walkabout"), in keeping with *kastom* norms. Finally, Malaitans claim that a snowball effect occurs: the more who migrate to town, the more feel able to follow, and rely on their relatives' support once there through the *wantok sistem*. While these reasons have bearing on possible migrants from every province, *kastom* practices are also important. Honiarans say that Malaitans are under particular pressure to perform economically because most practice brideprice exchanges. This mostly affects young, unmarried men,[13] but women and girls also say they feel obliged to contribute to family coffers to help pay for such expenses. Rural people tend to perceive Honiara as the place where cash is most readily available: whether through paid employment, gambling or theft (see Keesing 1994), and so the town exerts a strong pull on those requiring cash for prestations at home (see Strathern 1972, 1975). However, the disproportionate number of Malaitans in Honiara does not make for an overwhelmingly Malaitan town, as other ethnic groups are a strong presence in its milieu.

Honiara is on the island of Guadalcanal, but for the purposes of administration it is classed as a separate province. According to the 1986 census figures, people born in Guadalcanal province made up only 6.78% of the town's population, although they constituted 17.47 % of the total national population. However, it would be reasonable to assume that many more than 6.67% of Honiarans consider themselves Guadalcanalese, given that the census only recorded where a person was born, and not where they considered themselves to be *from*. As Honiara is situated on the island of Guadalcanal, then it is likely that many Guadalcanalese are born in Honiara's central hospital or elsewhere within Honiara's boundaries, and hence are recorded as Honiaran.

Honiara was originally constructed on the site of a small village that was devastated by fighting and military installations, but many villages remained outside the town's boundaries. However, other Guadalcanalese villages nestle by rivers in between the ridges of Honiara's suburbs. Therefore, as well as those living in the suburbs, many people from these

[13] See Knauft (1997: 239).

villages would have been included as Honiaran during census data collection. People from other islands often refer to those from Guadalcanal as "landowners" (*lanona*), this reflects their understanding of Honiara's land as not belonging to the government, but as only *used* by them in return for compensation payments. This became clear during the unrest in 1999, when Guadalcanalese landowners sought additional compensation for Honiara's land.

Constructions of Modernity

While descent is at the core of ethnicity, and Solomon Islanders maintain that *kastom* serves to maintain and restate ethnic difference, middle class engagement in town is partly a reaction against this. They attempt to become cosmopolitan and future-orientated, and describe life in town as "modern" (*moden*). Miller describes modernity in Trinidad as composed of a dualism between transience and transcendence, and explains that, "the fragility of their self-creation" is what makes Trinidadians "modern" (1994: 293). Later, I discuss how Honiarans also negotiate such a duality with ambivalence, but here I briefly sketch what Honiarans say constitute *moden* life-styles, and describe how these articulate with views of *kastom*. In the words of Comaroff and Comaroff: "modernity—itself always an imaginary construction of the present in terms of a mythic past—has its own magicalities, its own enchantments" (1993: xiv).

Middle class urbanites deem "town" (*taun*) life-styles to be sophisticated, essentially forward-looking and desirable. The term "modern" (*moden*) is becoming common currency, denoting a set of values which people present as largely opposed to those which are *lokol*, and draw on those they believe to be foreign and future orientated (see Wilk 1994). For middle class Honiarans, a *moden* life-style is one which embraces consumer goods, well paid employment, good housing, and autonomy from over-demanding relatives. For example, *moden* life-styles include certain patterns of consumption and sociability. Middle class urbanites tend to choose imported and store-bought foods above fresh garden produce, wear shoes, gamble at casinos, dance at night-clubs, and hold barbecues and birthday parties, all of which I discuss in subsequent chapters. They explain all of these things as those which *lokol* people are either unwilling or unable to do, either through lack of money or sophistication. The cosmopolitanism of *moden* life-styles includes many facets. Affluent Honiarans attempt to obtain goods from overseas, and simultaneously seek to engage with and understand the practices of many ethnic groups in town (cf. Hannerz 1996: 102-104).

Discourses about what is *moden* articulate in complex ways with those about *kastom* (see Gewertz and Errington 1996; Knauft 1997). Importantly, people perceive *kastom* and modernity as categories that facilitate discussion, definition and redefinition of all sides of

life. This is not to say that ideas about *kastom* and modernity are static and uncontested, in fact they are extremely plural and value laden (see Sutton 1994). However, they are categories that Solomon Islanders always claim to have strong opinions about: for instance, that a certain behaviour particularly follows *kastom*, or a *moden* way of life.

Middle class urbanites often articulate ambivalent and contradictory opinions about the significance of certain events and practices. For example, they may be seen as definitely non-*kastom*, yet are intersected by adherence to behaviours seen as distinctly those of *kastom*. However, this contradiction is not necessarily tantamount to confusion. As they constantly negotiate the interplay and tension between *kastom* and modernity, they draw on elements of each according to their needs. This gradually undermines specific, ethnically based ties with *kastom*, making them more generalised and thereby binding themselves more closely to autonomous life-styles they refer to as "modern" (*moden*). This is particularly evident in their redefinition of selves and urban society as based on nuclear rather than extended families, which I describe in the next section. This orientation means that urbanites forge friendships and alliances with one another based on what people can do rather than solely on which ethnic or kin group they belong to (see Marksbury 1993: 9).

This said, to a certain extent, *moden* values are inseparable from those believed to hail from the past, especially where morality is concerned. According to most urbanites, *moden* life-styles should entail morality predicated on a combination of *kastom*, which may incorporate Christian standards. While morality is a term which encompasses broad aspects of behaviour, Solomon Islanders show a particular concern with marital fidelity and general sexual morality. Knauft (1997) suggests that altered power differentials between the sexes in Melanesia has precipitated increased insecurity, and I would surmise that Honiarans' extreme concern with fidelity and sexual morality reflects this unease. In this way, there is no simple leap into *moden* life-styles, nor do these novel definitions entirely feed on previous ones. Instead, there is a sense that present and future entail both disjuncture and continuity with the past, whether actual or imagined. Importantly, what is *moden* is not static: its meaning is situational and continually changing.[14]

[14] Others also make this point. See Dwyer and Minnegal (1998), Errington and Gewertz (1997), Friedman and Carrier (1996), Gewertz and Errington (1996).

Kastom, ethnicity and transience: Felicity's pot[15]

The achievement of distance from *hom* may also be unsettling. This reflects the transient qualities that many people attribute to urban life, as opposed to the presumed stability of *hom*. Middle class people complain that things change too quickly in town. For instance, they dislike moving jobs and houses too often, because it unsettles them: disrupting social relationships with neighbours; their children's schooling; and even their desire to plant vegetable gardens. They see *hom* as stable, and say that they know where their houses will be next year; that neighbours are not strangers; that young children will go to the nearest school; and that gardens can be planted with long-term crops.

As mentioned above, Miller (1994) discusses modernity in Trinidad as manifested in a dualism between values of transcendence and transience: the former is expressed in the festivities of Christmas, and the latter in those of Carnival. Similar tensions occur in Honiara. While transcendence is associated with *kastom*, the future is connected with fears of transience. Jourdan (1995*b*: 144) has claimed that Honiarans lead lives that are future-centric. At the most everyday of levels, providing for the future entails establishing stable domestic bases within town, from which identities can be safely remoulded into the shape of a privileged group. Middle class Honiarans do not see the future as disconnected from the past, but their constructions of the future rely selectively on certain elements of the past. For instance, they valorise *kastom* cooking methods in certain circumstances, but denigrate *lokol* attitudes to clothing in others.

There are many examples of how *kastom* is associated with ethnic origin. The following story—about Felicity and her pot—shows how this association may be cross-cut by urbanites' desire to be cosmopolitan. Her story epitomises how this precipitates extreme ambivalence on the part of many urbanites, as they attempt to both distance themselves from *hom* and *kastom*, while also holding onto certain aspects of it. In this way, her tale encapsulates middle class values and ambivalence about social change.

Felicity brought a piece of *hom* with her to *taun*: a clay pot (*köre meso*) which she treasured enough to carry with her during her migrations for work around the Solomon Islands (see plate 5). To her, this pot was emblematic of *hom* and *kastom*, which she felt increasingly disconnected from. Felicity was from Alu Island in the Shortland Islands at the very western edge of the national territory. Shortland Islanders frequently point out their links to neighbouring Bougainville only seven miles away across a narrow strait. They

[15] Felicity is the only person in this thesis for whom I neither use a pseudonym or composite, she was delighted to tell her story, and happy that her name was publicly associated with it.

Plate 5: Felicity's pot.

bemoan the loss of trade and social links since violent conflict on Bougainville from 1988, and Papua New Guinea's blockade of the island in 1990 put a stop to most cross-border traffic. Felicity felt linked to Bougainvilleans through her grandmother from the west of that island.

Felicity took a strong interest in handicrafts, and always had a piece of weaving or sewing in process at her house. While she enjoyed the task in itself, she also saw it as a pleasant and cheap way to produce gifts tailor made for her friends and family: when I left the Solomon Islands to return home for the first time, she presented me with a skirt carefully sewn in my favoured style and colours. To Felicity, handicrafts were a way of expressing her sentiments. In addition, she strongly associated certain crafts with ethnically specific *kastom*, such that she saw particular string bags as associated with Bougainvillean *kastom*, and certain styles of leaf fans and mats as hailing from other ethnic groups. The clay pot, which she so carefully carried from house to house whenever she moved, exemplified *kastom* which had been lost or forgotten. It also indicated the way in which objects associated with *kastom* are given new interpretations and life in their current contexts.

Felicity's clay pot was round, smoke-blackened and about seven inches in diameter. It had belonged to her maternal grandmother who used to have a number of them for everyday cooking. Felicity and her older brother remember seeing them stored upside down above the hearth in her kitchen where wood-smoke blackened them. Felicity's brother told

her that women used to find clay and make pots at a special place in the bush on the Shortland Islands. She initially took the pot from home for an exhibit in a school display of *kastom* items when she was a student. Since then, Felicity has taken the pot with her whenever she has moved house, saying that it was the last complete one in her grandmother's collection, and that all the others were broken. She adds that she has not seen any other complete ones since she was a small girl, and now sees herself as the guardian of something "precious" that people do not know how to make any more.

> There aren't any more in my village, I just keep this one and carry it with me. For example, when I went to Vella [Vella Lavella, Western Province] for ten years, I took it with me. I first took it from home when I was living in Munda [on New Georgia, Western Province]. I took it because it's precious and nobody knows how to make them anymore: when whitemen's pots arrived for cooking, people started using them instead.

Felicity kept the pot carefully stored in a cupboard in her house and told her children not to use it or handle it. She said that she would continue to take her pot with her on any subsequent house moves. Although she had not promised it to any of her children, she hoped that one of them would want to look after it after her death.

> I keep it in the cupboard and have told my children not to hold it—I put newspaper inside it and keep it upside down. I'll keep it, then if it doesn't break and I die, one of my children can take it.

She likened her interest in the pot to her interest in handicrafts, adding that she would like to learn how to make pots, but that she did not know anyone who could teach her. Her interest in learning was both pragmatic and ideological. First, she hoped that she and other women could make their own cooking pots rather than buy poor-quality expensive manufactured ones. Second, she saw skill in making pottery as part of her *kastom*, which she did not want to be lost forever. When her Bougainvillean work-mate offered to introduce Felicity to a Bougainvillean man who made similar pots, Felicity became excited. She hoped the man would be able to teach her how to make Bougainvillean pots, which she described as passably similar to those of the Shortland Islands.

> I'm a person who's interested in weaving and making things, and nobody knows how to make these pots. It'd be good if anyone could teach me. If people could make these it would really help, so that people wouldn't have to buy cooking pots, which are expensive and break quickly.

The pot not only signified Felicity's *hom*, and her ancestry, but also indicated their transference into the future. Learning to make pots would not bring that *kastom* back to life, but would bring it into the present day. Felicity's emphasis was very much not just on the fact that the pot was an heirloom to be protected, but also that it was a useful item, which unfortunately nobody knew how to make any more. She would have liked to have used it, but was worried that it would break, and the knowledge of how these pots looked and felt would be lost.[16] Also, her care for the pot and her desire to preserve it for her children after her death served to reinforce a view of the past as something to be protected, for fear that knowledge of it would disappear. Thus, while the pot was originally a cooking implement, it has obtained new status in the light of Felicity's position as a *moden*, mobile woman, and helps her definition of herself as such.

Felicity's attitudes are fairly typical of her peer group. She equated certain practices—in her case, making pottery—with ethnicity, and her tone indicated the emotional manner in which urbanites expressed their loss of *kastom.* Her attitude toward passing the pot on to her children also showed Honiarans' desire to invest in the future through their children, who in turn will care for their parents once they become old. In this way, she negated the possibility of transience by carrying the quality and importance of *kastom* embodied in the pot into the future.

In this way, while Felicity's distancing from home was largely consciously self-imposed, this did not preclude ambivalence and regret. After overhearing my discussion with Felicity about her pot, a young man explained that although he enjoyed the privileges of life in town, he regretted that he knew little about the *kastom* of his *hom*, saying: "it [my lack of knowledge] makes me feel like a part of me is missing."[17]

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[16] Several of these pots are stored in the National Museum. Felicity was aware of this, but had never been to see them. Once objects are displayed in the museum, many Honiarans see them as protected but untouchable and unusable parts of the past. As its director, Foana'ota, has pointed out: "some people, including top government officers, still regard it [the National Museum] as a dumping place for old, meaningless, and dead objects that no longer have any value or use to the communities in the provinces. This attitude strongly influences the way people interpret the types of cultural programs, activities, and services that the staff try to provide from time to time" (1994: 100). While Foana'ota emphasises that the attitude of officials influences the attitude of the masses, this is probably a two-way process.

[17] Similar sentiments are not solely confined to town. For example, Donner (1993: 545) reports similar sentiments on Sikaiana. However, it seems that they are often more marked in town contexts.

Ethnicity, creolisation and hybridisation

Felicity's story shows how constructions of ethnicity and *kastom* are in constant play with constructions of *hom*, *taun* and *moden*. Underneath these articulations, practices and values viewed as ethnically specific, jostle with one another in Honiara's multi-ethnic milieu. Hybridisation offers a useful device for understanding the interplay between these categories. The 1980s and 1990s saw a rise in anthropological interest in inter-cultural transactions or flows. In many ways this is a continuation of earlier concerns with "syncretism", remodelled and repackaged in order to deal with the scale of globalisation. In particular, writers have used such notions to discuss modernity, globalisation and transnationalism. As Clifford points out, terms such as "border, travel, creolization, transculturation, hybridity, and diaspora", "jostle and converse in an effort to characterize the contact zones of nations, cultures and regions" (1997: 245). Hannerz (1987, 1992, 1996) has been at the vanguard of the movement that uses devices such as "creolisation" and "hybridity" to describe the flux and change wrought by the flow of knowledge and practices between cultures, which he explains is not necessarily harmonious:

> The creativity that may come about as perspectives meet with each other does not always grow out of affinity, however. It can also result from their clash. Different cultural forms can inspire one another, but they can also provoke one another through conflict and discord.
> (Hannerz 1992: 212)

Hannerz's works invites analysis of cultural flows and the uneven distribution of knowledge, and Appadurai argues that—among other things—"ethnoscapes" should be subjects of study. By ethnoscapes, he means: "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (1996: 33), and suggests that anthropologists need to focus on the movements of people which affect the "politics of nations" and cross-cut the relatively stable communities and networks of social life. But, how exactly should anthropologists perform the tasks that these meta-theorists suggest? In an attempt to bring such theories to an ethnographic level, this thesis does not discuss flows and movements in abstract terms, but focuses on the everyday practices and knowledge that ultimately constitute them.

Creolisation is a device, or construct, that stems from linguistics. Linguists define a creole language as one which has surpassed an initial mixing phase—syncretic or hybrid phase—and has become nativised and permanently hybridised (Foley 1997: 393). In criticism of trends in the study of transnationalism, Mintz claims that the term "creolisation" has suffered from chronic overuse, as all cultures are necessarily the product of mixing:

"Things aren't what they used to be, to be sure; but then they never were" (1998: 131). More specifically, Mintz points out that socio-cultural "creolization" emerged as a means to describe a "culture building" which was a response to a specific set of geographical, historical, and economic circumstances in the Caribbean (1998: 119). As such, it has been incorrectly appropriated to exaggerate the extent of globalisation and transnationalism. In a slightly different vein, Friedman (1997: 73) has pointed out that discussions of creolisation or hybridisation rest on the assumption that some forms of discrete "ethnic" or "cultural" groups exist in order to merge. Despite such reasonable observations, they do not mean that creolisation is an entirely useless concept, rather that it has its uses alongside an awareness that it is nothing new, and that all cultures are "hybrid" or "creole".

Throughout the thesis, I make reference to Jourdan's ongoing combination of linguistic and anthropological work in Honiara. The first anthropologist to work almost exclusively in Honiara,[18] she has suggested that the social processes and circumstances for creolisation, which she terms "creolicity", are central to understanding language (*Pijin*) change. She demonstrates the standardising and nativising effect of Honiara's linguistic pluralism on *Pijin* (1985), and makes much of Honiara's ethnic pluralism in her more recent works (1995*a*, 1995*b*, 1996). While her work is clearly inspirational in its approach to urban life, this thesis adds a sustained description of the mechanics of everyday life and class formation to her descriptions of Honiara.

Importantly, I have shown how Solomon Islanders clearly distinguish between many ethnic groups, largely those that correspond with language groups. Members of ethnic groups that Solomon Islanders *do* claim are distinct must engage closely with one another in town, and must find means of negotiating this pluralism. On some occasions, their negotiations involve creativity and culture building that does comply with models of syncretism and hybridisation resulting in creole forms. At other times, negotiation invokes tension and discord that emphasises and reinforces the integrity of discrete ethnic groups, in what may be termed ethnification (although I do not mean to imply that creolisation is always represented as a harmonious process). In this way, the development of a middle class in Honiara is in no way a matter of a simple trend towards hybrid practices, rather, hybridisation and ethnification operate in a dialectic with one another. Furthermore, throughout this thesis, I address how Honiarans conduct themselves in manners which may appear hybrid, but are actually rooted in acute ethnic divisions. However, such ethnic

[18] Jourdan's early work (1985) compares *Pijin* in Honiara to that used in Avu Avu, Guadalcanal. Her later work has been more strongly—almost exclusively—located in Honiara (1995*a*, 1995*b*, 1996).

divisions are masked by Honiarans desire to be "quiet" while in public in order to avoid affront and conflict.

Such processes may serve political ends: in particular, the ability to operate in a "cosmopolitan" way may constitute power for more elite groups (Friedman 1997: 72). While this cosmopolitan behaviour and knowledge is more often applied to transnational elites (see Hau'ofa 1987), forms of this behaviour arise among those who, while not elite, live cosmopolitan, urban lives. In this way, middle class Honiarans successfully negotiate ethnicity as part of their attempts to distance themselves from *hom* and *kastom*.

The dialectic between hybridisation and ethnification in practice: kinship terms and avoidance of personal names

Many Melanesian groups practice *kastom* prohibitions concerning use of personal names of certain relatives and affines as terms of address. Adherence to such prohibitions is by no means uniform, and serves to illustrate some of the complexities of the circumstances, which may lead to either hybridisation or ethnification. In particular, when ethnic groups interact by way of inter-ethnic marriages (which I discuss more fully in Chapter 2), their adoption or refusal to adopt the kinship terms and *kastom* terms of respect for affines illustrate this dynamic. Such practices reflect and reinforce people's acceptance or rejection of different *kastom* practices as well as their individual circumstances and belief in their own stability within the urban milieu. Furthermore, "tactical" (Bloch 1971) use of *Pijin* kinship terms is one of the ways in which urbanites can further consolidate their distance from the values and practices of home.

Anne from Kwara'ae, Malaita was married to James from Choiseul. James's cousin, Mark, was married to Anne's second cousin, Joan. Anne said that she was careful to follow Choiseulese *kastom* and not call Joan by her personal name, as she was a female affine, despite the fact that Joan was, in fact, from Kwara'ae. Choiseulese *kastom* would require that if Anne wanted to show respect for Joan as an affine, she should use the term *ravanggu* (in Varisi: see Scheffler 1965: 71, 82-83).[19] However, Anne said that as neither she nor Joan were from Choiseul, she preferred to use a term which was intelligible to all, choosing to refer to Joan by a teknonym: *mami blo Francis* ("mother of Francis": Francis was Joan's first born son). Had Joan and Anne not been related to one another by marriage to Choiseulese men, then Anne said that she would call Joan "*Andi*" (*Pijin* for "aunt"), or "*tea*" (Kwara'ae

[19] Mainly though, this prohibition applies to *kastom* names, fewer prohibitions surround Christian names, but some still apply this prohibition too. Using pronouns and allusion is a way to avoid uttering a *kastom* name.

for "mother, mother's sister", "father's brother's wife", and—in this case—"mother's father's brother's granddaughter").

Anne explained that her adoption of a teknonym for Joan was her way of "respecting" her husband and his kin. She also said that she followed similar practices for her husband's sisters or cousins by not using their personal names. Anne was clear that avoidance of affines' personal names was not Kwara'ae *kastom*, but was that of Choiseul. *Kastom* in most areas of Malaita stresses respect in affinal relationships, but this does not entail prohibitions on use of personal names (for example, see Ross 1973: 152). On the other hand, Joan regularly referred to Anne and all of her husband's sisters by name, and said that she felt no need to follow Choiseulese *kastom* as it was not her own. However, she added that she was more careful to adhere to Choiseulese naming prohibitions when she visited Choiseul with her husband, in order to show respect in that context. She further justified her abstinence from naming prohibitions by claiming that many Choiseul people themselves do not follow their own *kastom*. One Choiseulese woman explained that she did not follow *kastom* prohibitions regarding names as everyone called her by her personal name anyway.

In this context, people claim that some adhere to *kastom* and others do not, rather than subscribing to a notion of a changing *kastom*. What is interesting is why Anne chose to follow—to a large extent—Choiseul name prohibitions, whereas Joan did not. Largely, their difference is related to their individual circumstances and the value each of them placed on *kastom* as a means of showing respect. It is also connected to their mutual positions in an urban hierarchy, and their relationships with their husbands. While Anne felt secure and affluent within the urban milieu, Joan constantly repeated her wish to live at either her own or her husband's home, especially as they found town life financially stressful. On the other hand, Anne had significant problems within her marriage, which made her less willing to show respect for her husband and his *kastom* than Joan felt with regard to her husband.

In another instance, a Choiseulese woman (from the south of the island in the *Mbambatana* speaking region) and her Guadacanalese husband (from the south of the island in the *Talise* speaking area) were hosts to the woman's maternal uncle and his wife. The guests were welcome as they spent much time caring for the couple's two young children. As a deferential term, the wife referred to her uncle as "*papa*",[20] and her Guadalcanalese husband adopted the same term "to show his respect." While according to *kastom*, people from both Choiseul and Guadalcanal avoid personal names of this particular grade of relatives (see Hogbin 1937: 69; Scheffler 1965: 82), it is interesting here that the

[20] This woman explained that she used the term "*papa*" to refer to her mother's brother; father's father; mother's father; and father's sister's husband.

Guadalcanalese man chose to use the *Mbambatana* term rather than that from his own *langguis*. Largely, his use of the term reflected his harmonious relationship with his wife and her kin, and as such indicates how personal circumstances affect people's adoption of the *kastom* of their spouses, which I discuss further in the next chapter.

The example of Joan and Anne shows how middle class people are beginning adopt *Pijin* kinship terminology, which reflects their knowledge of English kinship terms rather than those of *langguis*. For instance, Joan said that had Anne and herself not been related by marriage, then she would refer to Anne as either *tea* (Kwara'ae) or *andi* (*Pijin*). While *tea* refers to mother and mother's sisters; most middle class, educated Kwara'ae do not translate *tea* into *mami* ("mother"), other than for their birth or nurturant mother (cf. Kwa'ioloa and Burt 1997: 31). Instead, they translate most classes of *tea* and *'a'ai* (father's sisters and mother's brother's wives) into *andi* ("aunt"). Although people are still aware of the differences between *tea* and *'a'ai*, a shift towards *andi* as a term for both *tea* and *'a'ai* and the use of *mami* for only one type of *tea*, in-part echoes the flexibility in *langguis* systems of kinship terminology. Within *langguis* kinship terminology, people employ terms to express the degree of personal relationship as well as to refer to precise genealogical relationships. For example, a genealogically distant relative who assumes importance in someone's life will be called by a term that is usually reserved for genealogically close relatives. Flexibility in these systems seems to pave the way for adoption of a system of kinship terms, which people freely agree is generic and imported from English, especially through the education system that is based on English after primary level (see Chapter 6). In this way, adoption of English-derived kinship terminology may stem from both a certain plasticity in *langguis* kinship terminology systems, and urbanites' attempts to distance themselves from *langguis* and associated *kastom*.

Instilling ethnicity and urban status in children: naming and food

To a certain extent, the creation of a person's identity—and thereby status as a person—starts before conception, as he or she is seen as belonging to the ethnic group of his or her birth parents, and also as the outcome of ancestors' actions. Although only the mother may initially know the ethnicity of her child's father, when her pregnancy becomes more widely known about, the father's ethnicity becomes a much discussed topic. However, while identity as a member of a particular ethnic group is seen as given by birth and merely augmented by practice, status as a middle class urbanite (rather than as a *lokol* person) is fundamentally created through practice. The role of parents is crucial in emphasising ethnicity and instilling

urban identity in their children. In particular, parents use naming and feeding practices to achieve these effects.

Many women hide their pregnancies, claiming to feel unwell because of malaria or flu, rather than acknowledge to others that they are carrying a child. Only when there is no further way of disguising their pregnancies under roomy clothing will they, perhaps, admit their pregnancies to friends or relatives. I saw women enter their seventh and eighth months of pregnancy without admitting it to anyone, even when asked. Most women say that this is because pregnant women feel "shame" (*sem*) about pregnancy, because it constitutes visible evidence of women's sexual activities.[21] During birth, male relatives are never present, although fathers-to-be may wait nearby. Members of many ethnic groups adhere to *kastom* beliefs about the polluting qualities of parturition fluids, and some associate degree and duration of labour pains with the sexual conduct of the child's father (see Chapter 2).

After a child is born and brought back to the house, naming is one of the first clear markers of identity that parents and family impart to a child. Surnaming is a relatively new practice. The usual pattern is for a person to have a Christian name, a *kastom* name, and a confirmation name if they are Roman Catholic. *Kastom* names are usually names in *langguis*, often those of an older or deceased relative, or chosen because they refer to a significant characteristic of the child. Many urbanites use their *kastom* name in lieu of a surname when dealing with officialdom. Until recently, upon and after marriage, both people would keep their *kastom* names. However, it is becoming more common for women to adopt their husband's name—after their own *kastom* name—as a surname. Children therefore use a Christian name, a *kastom* name, and their father's *kastom* name as a surname.

Close relatives are often the ones to choose names for new-born children. If the child is a boy, then usually a member of the father's side will choose the name; if a girl then someone from the mother's side will have that task. However, this is not necessarily the case: if there is tension between a couple then naming may be a site for playing out their grievances with one another in a power struggle over who will name the child. However, more usually, parents will mention to a relative or close friend that the child does not have a name yet, expecting that relative to reply: "call them by my name." This might be either a Christian or *kastom* name. Such a relative is then the child's "name" (*nem*), taking a special interest in the child: their "namesake" (*nemsek*).[22] Sometimes the namer chooses a *kastom*

[21] Melhuus (1997) makes similar observations about the contradictions inherent in women's virtue. She claims that in Mexico, a good woman is one who is both a mother and asexual. She relates this to Roman Catholic Christian images of the Virgin Mother. In the Solomon Islands, as *kastom* among many ethnic groups entails proscriptions on certain forms of male contact with female genitalia and products of birth, then such beliefs may be connected to both Christianity and *kastom*.

[22] Although sometimes both child and adult may be referred to as one another's *nemsek*.

name, sometimes a Christian one. It is usually up to the parent to choose a second name. However, in certain circumstances, people may change their own names: one man explained how one of his relatives had disliked his name as it meant "weak and cold", so he changed it to the opposite so that is meant "strong and hot". Soon everyone started calling him by his preferred name.

One couple were particularly articulate about their reasons for giving their children certain names, which show the interconnection of kinship ties with ethnicity. Their case is interesting as the couple were from different ethnic groups: the man from Choiseul and the woman from Malaita. Pinned to the couple's lounge wall was a chart listing their five children's first—Christian—names and birth-dates, written by their father. In different coloured marker pens, the children added their *kastom* names, which their mother says they did of their own accord. Although the older school age children know their *kastom* names, at school they all used their father's *kastom* name as a surname.

The first four of the five children all had Choiseulese *kastom* names, only the last-born child had a Malaitan *kastom* name. His mother says that she chose it for him, and that it was the name of her own father, which she chose because she expected him to be her last born son. She added that she also gave it to him so that if he ever went to Malaita and anyone wanted to fight with him because they thought he was from another island with his dark skin, then he could turn to them and say, "I am Malaitan, as my name shows" (Malaitans sometimes say that they are particularly fearful of unprovoked fighting with other Malaitans, because of the possibility of payback and compensation claims, which is more commonplace and expensive than among other ethnic groups).

The children's father explained that he had chosen the names for the other three children, but was happy that his wife chose that of the last born. He said that his first born daughter had his own sister's name. The second daughter's name had a meaning in his natal language, meaning: "you come". He laughed about the third daughter's name, saying that it also had a meaning in his language, and that he called her: "every [child] is a girl" as she was his third child, but all had been girls. He added that he would have liked to have named the fourth child—a boy—after his own father, but felt that he could not do so because one of his relatives had already been given that name. Instead, he named his son after the qualities of his father: calling him the *langguis* term meaning "peaceful". His only regret was that he had not named any of his daughters after the Australian woman at a mission station, who had brought him up after his own mother had died. He explained that he chose not to, feeling awkward because so many others had asked to use her name, but added that he would like

one of his granddaughters to have the woman's name. In this way, naming reflects networks of social parenthood, close friendships as well as being a way of consolidating ethnicity.

When a child is born, relatives and friends discuss whether the child physically resembles the father or the mother. In an inter-ethnic marriage, this takes on special salience as parents discuss children's skin-colour in relation to their parents. Physical resemblance is so important that people often use it to determine who is the father of a child, for instance, if infidelity is suspected. Deciding whom a child resembles, is often the cause of much hilarity. As children grow up, the discussion continues. Sometimes parents and relatives label them as definitely from either the mother's or father's lineage: "side" (*saed*), but sometimes as *haf an haf* ("half and half").[23] People use other cues as well as looks, to decide whether children resemble their mother or father the most. Parents, relatives and friends discuss children's behaviour—sometimes disparagingly—to indicate whether a child takes most influence from: which parent has been "stronger" in making children. In this way, while ethnicity is given according to descent it is also manipulated. Thus, if a child of three or four years of age continues to play naked, and always removes their clothing, then the mother might jokingly refer to that child as from her husband's place, indicating that her husband's home is less *moden*, and more *lokol* than her own.

As children grow up, language becomes a topic over which parents may come into conflict. Which *langguis* parents teach to their children often reflects how interested each parent is in their upbringing. In addition, it reflects their attitude to their own *langguis* and whether they value their *hom* background over *taun* life-styles dominated by *Pijin*. Many urbanites do not see *langguis* knowledge as crucial, especially those parents who envisage their children growing up into a world where *Pijin* and English are the languages of government and business. This is especially important for the middle classes who hope that their children will participate in society as doctors, nurses and airline pilots.

Parents sometimes express fears that children reared solely in town will not be aware of certain *kastom* practices of home. For instance, one mother was worried that her daughters would not learn the correct way to show respect to their male relatives when they visited home for holidays. To this end, she kept a close eye on them at home: explaining how to sit and talk to her uncles, and that they should never be seen by them making their way to the toilet area (see also Chapter 3). She claimed that her husband was unsupportive of her, because he was from a different island and did not fully understand the *kastom* of her home. Thus, she was left as the sole educator of her children, both boys and girls, on such matters

[23] This term is more commonly heard in reference to children of unions between a Solomon Islander and someone from another country.

of etiquette. Socialisation of children often starts early, for example, most people encourage children and babies to shake hands in greeting and wave good-bye from an early age.

In addition to their management of names, language and etiquette, parents use food to instil urban, cosmopolitan identities in their children. This is largely because parents see food as integral to childrens' development. Breast-feeding often continues into a child's second or third years, only curtailed if the mother bears another child. Public health programmes have exerted strong influence in this regard, and mothers employ their rhetoric to discuss breast milk as best for baby because it nourishes and provides immunity from illness. By the same token, awareness of the transfer of anti-malarial drugs through breast milk to children is always seen as a good thing, and never as harmful: despite the fact that healthcare workers would say otherwise in some cases.[24] In addition, Honiarans claim that certain foodstuffs cause or aggravate illness. For example, many parents maintain that greasy foods exacerbates children's coughs, and Malaitan mothers attribute children's oral thrush to their mothers' consumption of deep-sea fish during pregnancy. While such claims are often specific to certain ethnic groups, people belonging to other groups say that they have heard their friends discussing these assertions, and have started to believe them too. In this way, some knowledge of illness that was previously ethnically-specific is becoming generic in the urban milieu.

Mothers and carers generally wean babies on a mash of pawpaw, sweet potatoes and green vegetables. Women often berate mothers they see weaning their children on rice alone for not providing enough nutrition to make their very young children *fat,* which connotes: "well developed, strong and healthy." Usually by the age of three, children's mothers start to feed them usual town fare: rice topped with a mixture of tinned tuna (*taiyo*),[25] noodles and green vegetables. In addition, everyone deems sweet bananas, pawpaw, mango and water melon to be children's foods, which are nonetheless enjoyed by adults, but are primarily given to children. People say that the softness of these foods makes them suitable for children, and that the sweetness eases their crying. Ice cream, crispy snacks and sugary bottled drinks serve this purpose alongside fruits, although public health programmes

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[24] In December 1996, Honiara's Malaria eradication programme conducted a mass drug administration which did not take into account whether women were pregnant or breast feeding at the time. One of the drugs was *fansidar* which health workers generally advise against giving to pregnant or breast-feeding women on account of the possibility of foetal abnormalities and developmental problems for breast-fed children.

[25] *Taiyo* is the Japanese brand name of Solomon Islands tinned tuna: in this way, all tinned tuna is generically known as *taiyo*. There is first and second grade *taiyo*: the latter being dark meat flakes in oil, cheaper and stronger in flavour and preferred by most people. Being able to afford the light-meat first grade *taiyo* is a sign of affluence and is usually reserved for special occasions only, although some people dislike it, claiming it tastes bland.

influence some people when they ask parents to feed their children fruits rather than processed foodstuffs. Some parents heed the messages and espouse their rhetoric, but others see no harm in such foods, and say that they are suitable for children because their children enjoy them.

Solomon Islanders make a clear distinction between processed foods and those grown locally: *kaikai blo waetman* ("whiteman's food") and *lokol kaikai* ("local food"). In other contexts *lokol* is a disparaging term, used to indicate that perceived as underdeveloped. When used to refer to food, *lokol* generally connotes that which is good, that which is energy giving; causes strength and growth; and, where adult food is concerned, is not soft but is *strong* (solid and chewable). As one woman in a rural area explained: "If I eat taro in the morning then I can work in the garden all day, but if I eat rice, I'm soon hungry again." When a rural-dweller visits relatives in town, they usually bring a sack or two filled with produce. Of these, they value taro as the most beneficial for strength and growth, yams next, followed by sweet potato and cassava. Prices at Honiara's market reflect this sliding scale.

Relatives visiting from home often berate urban mothers for feeding rice to their children. When they do so, their complaints are based on the argument that such food is unstrengthening, and also that it distances children from home, and, by extrapolation, from the Solomon Islands: home *lokol* food is better than other *lokol* food, but other *lokol* food is better than imported food.[26] Town children used to an easy-chew diet of *taiyo,* rice and noodles often find more solid home foods difficult to stomach. When parents give home *lokol* food to their children, they hope that the children will enjoy it, but are disappointed rather than angry if they do not. However, people visiting from home are often angry with their urban relatives for not feeding their children *lokol* food regularly. They say that urbanites should encourage children to eat the strengthening and energising *lokol* food. Rural people see their urban relatives' over-reliance on imported foodstuffs in these physical terms, and also as tantamount to a social separation between them. Furthermore, while urbanites say that they do value *lokol* food, they also employ food as an element of sociability through which they pit ideals of *taun* and *hom* life against one another, the minutiae of which I discuss further in Section 2.

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[26] An awareness that many people see locally produced food as better than imported food is an interesting part of the Australian Ricegrowers Co-operative's marketing slogans for rice. They market their rice in the Solomon Islands as *Solrais: barava rais blo Solomon Aelan* ("Solrais: real Solomon Islands rice"), which is similar to their marketing of *Trukai* in Papua New Guinea. See Foster for a discussion of the role of print advertising and slogans in the creation of a "national style of consciousness" in Papua New Guinea (1995*b*: 177). See also Errington and Gewertz, who describe how Chambri have become "biscuitized", and Arnott's Biscuits have become "Chambrified" (1996: 119).

When a couple hail from different islands to one another, disagreement about the quality of home *lokol* foods is inevitable. Usually though, in this context, couples do not discuss food in a serious way: their debates about its quality tend to be light and humorous. Many say that explicit discussion of food implies greed. This, however, does not imply that food is not a focus for contestation. For example, if a relative arrives from Santa Isabel bearing a cool-box full of fish, then Honiarans will discuss how fish from there is better than that available in town from the waters around Guadalcanal. Or, when a man's relatives bring *Ngali* nuts[27] from Makira, his wife might joke with him that he says they are better than those from Malaita, but that is only because he has not tasted nuts from home for a long time, so his judgement is clouded. She might then add that it is, however, a good thing for their children to taste food from both places, even if only to decide that they prefer imported foodstuffs. In this way, the tension that is implicit in the first comment is partially resolved by focusing on the children during the second.

Naming and food are therefore key elements of obtaining urban middle class status in the light of ethnicity. In Section 2, I discuss further the role which food plays in middle class attempts to distance themselves from *hom*, and contrast Honiarans' construction of friendships through food to those described by A. Strathern (1973) in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, where eating together creates kinship.

Conclusions

Middle class redefinitions of themselves involve a move away from home and *kastom* centred life towards town and "modern" ones. This is not to say that these novel definitions of sociality entirely feed on previous ones, nor that there is a simple leap into "modernity" (see Friedman and Carrier 1996). Instead, there is a sense that present (and future) entails both disjuncture and continuity with constructions of the past. Middle class Honiarans are critically aware of their own roles as agents of change and aspire to modes of living that are similar to, yet different from, village life. Often they cast the latter as exemplifying an authentic (and sometimes autochthonous) past, particularly in moral terms. It is important for people to see themselves as distanced from home life-styles, but also still attached and having ethnic identity as middle class urbanites, but having roots at home through blood ties of kinship and ethnicity.

In this chapter, I described how ethnicity and *kastom* are at the root of everyday life, and can be understood as in flux. I also explained how hybridisation operates in a dialectic

[27] Nuts of the *Canarium* almond tree.

with maintenance of ethnicity. In the next chapter, I begin to address these issues in greater depth, as I show how Honiarans employ ethnicity to make judgements about marriage and sexual morality.

Chapter 2
Making connections: marriage and morality

In the Introduction and Chapter 1, I have explained how Honiarans' constructions of *kastom, hom* and ethnicity are at the heart of their everyday lives, and discussed how these are cross-cut by notions of *moden* and *taun*. This chapter further explores the tenacity and fluidity of these categories by examining the interactions that take place in marriage. While this involves relationships between two spouses *and* between two "sides" (*saed*) of relatives, in this chapter I focus on the former, although I do include how the judgements of relatives may affect choice of spouse. This chapter shows how the internal dynamics of marriages are important elements in the creation of a middle class, as it is through them that people negotiate ethnic differences at close quarters. Furthermore, marriages form the foundations of integral households, which I discuss in Section 2.

The first part of this chapter explores the constitution of marriage, and some of tensions that are played out during stages of courtship, weddings and within established marriages. In particular, I show how inter-ethnic marriages are becoming more commonplace, and explain how ethnicity is implicated in choice of spouse. While some writers have stressed the changes occurring in brideprice and marriage exchanges (see Carrier 1993; Filer 1985; Jorgensen 1993; Pflanz-Cook 1993), these are only the most observable arenas of culture change, and a cluster of other issues operates alongside them, especially the constitution of moral probity and the suitability of spouses. Ideas about morality are less easily observed, but are nonetheless important and serve to distance the middle class from the values of home and strengthen their sense of belonging with one another in town.

The latter part of this chapter examines Honiarans' discussions of moral probity in the context of marital break-down. References to sexual morality and infidelity are an ever-present feature of middle class discourse. Judgements about sexual conduct and morality are usually couched in terms of ethnicity, gender, and the urban/rural divide. There is, of course, no simple causal relationship between these categories. Rather, they exist in an incoherent and fluid dynamic. Discussion about sexual morality is so prevalent among urbanites, that it assumes a significance that goes beyond a fascination with other people's private lives. Perhaps this, in part, is because sexual license or probity influences the stability of people's positions, whether at home or in town. For instance, if the permanence of a marriage is threatened by infidelity, then this may also cause problems with a couple's emotional and economic relationships with their kin and friends, thereby challenging the tenacity

of their affiliation with kin or class groups. As middle class identity is still being created (relatively few people were born middle class), then membership of that class is necessarily fragile, and middle class urbanites are particularly concerned with threats to their redefinition of self and sociality. Discourses about sexual morality appear to operate in two ways. First, discourse that is explicitly about sexual morality becomes a vehicle for expressing concerns about fragility of class identities. Second, discourses about sexual morality may be attempts to resolve this fragility by defining a common, class-based concern with morality that encompasses diverse notions of *kastom*, Christianity and modernity.

Defining marriage

During the 1986 national census, organisers instructed enumerators to consider people as married "if their union was confirmed by a legal, religious or customary ceremony, but also if two people lived together as man and wife without such formal recognition" (SISO 1989*b*: 123). The census relied on a definition of marriage that is a reasonable reflection of Solomon Islanders' perceptions of what constitutes a marriage, as I discuss below. While members of Honiara's affluent population pride themselves on their cosmopolitan life-styles, this does not translate into any major differences in census marriage statistics between Honiarans and those living in the rest of the country, either for age or rates of marriage. Census figures also show that most Honiarans marry at some point in their lives: 91% of men over 60 years old, and 94.6% of women over 60 have ever been married (SISO 1989a: 183. Table 12). Although this does not provide information about inter-ethnic marriages, there has been a marked increase in rates of inter-ethnic marriages between the former generation and that of my informants, as I show below.

There is no single, typical form of courtship, wedding or marriage in Honiara. Although a few marriages are still arranged, most urbanites say that their choices of spouses are based on bonds of mutual love and agreement, an ideology that some suggest is becoming increasingly stressed in Pacific urban centres (Marksbury 1993: 7-9; Falgout 1993: 142-145). Older relatives tend to avoid appearing dictatorial when advising young people about their choice of spouse, instead they offer gentle guidance, which is often based on factors such as the earning ability and relationship history of a potential spouse. This resonates with Marksbury's suggestion that marriage choices in Oceania are increasingly based on what someone does, or could do, rather than who they are (1993: 9-17). This distinction is useful as it emphasises the increasing importance of employment, education and cosmopolitan skills, and concomitant decreasing emphasis placed on kinship and ethnicity. However, as the cases I discuss below show, this shift is by no means total:

ethnicity still plays a key role in marriage plans, and is important in household dynamics, which I discuss in Section 2.

In Honiara, adults say that they are fearful of preventing their younger relatives from marrying whom they wish, because youngsters controlled in this way may commit suicide. Many people tell of first hand knowledge of such cases. Adults claim that they are more lenient with their children than their own parents were with them. People over the age of forty are more likely than younger people to have had their marriages arranged for them. Some middle-aged people express bitterness about this, claiming that they wish their parents had allowed them to marry the person of their choice, as young people today are able to. One woman complained that she had absolutely no say in whom she would marry, and her parents removed her from a successful school career to marry an older man. They locked her up before the wedding to prevent her from running away. Latterly though, she became visibly proud of the success of her "good marriage", which she said was constituted by "sacrifice", "working together", "Christian understanding" and "support". In particular, she cited her husband's acceptance of her desire to work outside the house as an important element of their success, which she saw as largely a result of her own patience and hard work.

I was told that many marriages take place after a girl has become pregnant, although there are numerous cases of girls bearing a child, not marrying the father and later marrying someone else of their choice. Relatively little stigma is attached to a child born to an unmarried girl; however, the girl might find herself under various pressures. For instance, if she bears a child by an unmarried man, then she may feel compelled by him and her relatives to marry. Pressure on an unmarried father is more likely to come from the male relatives of the girl and himself, rather than directly from the girl. If the child's father is already married (to someone else), then little more is said about the matter. While many people are tolerant of unmarried mothers, others gossip about their lack of moral rectitude, although such gossip does constitute a breech of the valued norm of "quietness". Also, if a girl is from a group whose members conventionally make brideprice payments, when she is ready to marry, her fiancé's relatives will cite her motherhood as a bargaining tool to negotiate a lower brideprice (if her parents have not already mentioned that they are taking this into account).

Illegitimate children are sometimes fostered—in an arrangement known as "adoption" (*adopetem*)—into their mother's household, even if the mother eventually marries someone who is not the child's father. More commonly though, grandparents or one of the mother's childless relative "adopt" illegitimate children. Such arrangements are commonplace yet unofficial, and usually the child is aware who their biological mother is,

possibly returning to them when older. Relatives also "adopt" children as a temporary coping strategy if a couple is experiencing problems which affect their ability to care for the children, for example, if there is no money to pay for education, or if one parent has left the household.

While many weddings in Honiara take place under the authority of one of the Christian Churches, some are sanctioned by the Magistrate's Court. Others are *de facto* marriages which entail no marking ceremony, and some are marked by a feast and the parents' acceptance of the union. Both *de facto* and marriages marked by a *kastom* feast tend to be described as *kastom marit* ("custom marriages"), although this does not imply that everyone views them on a par (see below). Frequently, couples start married life in *de facto* marriages, hold *kastom* feasts later, followed by church or state ceremonies. Most commonly, marriages are eventually brought about by a combination of *kastom* and church arrangements (see Kwa'ioloa and Burt, 1997). Sometimes, ceremonies take place within a short time of one another, but a couple's *de facto* marriage may precede a church or state ceremony by several years.

While most people recognise all of these arrangements as legitimate forms of marriage, clergy and those who are active in churches adopt rather different perspectives. For instance, some lay church leaders say that *de facto* marriages are wrong: that they disapprove of these *bus marit* ("bush marriages"). Furthermore, they claim that *kastom* marriages do join a couple together in the eyes of family, but that marriages are only *tru* ("true/real") when sanctioned by the church and "the eyes of God." Such people make similar statements about civil ceremonies, and say that they join a couple in the eyes of the law, but not in God's eyes. In these ways, they rank marriages in terms of their visibility: *bus marit* are the least visible, the least marked, and therefore the least valid; *kastom* and civil are less so, but make the union visible to different audiences; and church marriages are at the pinnacle of visibility. Some churches mark their views on the differences in each form of marriage by denying the Eucharist to those not married in church. Others—such as the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC)—prevent couples who are not married in church from participating in church services, until they publicly confess their wrong-doing. This makes couples married by *kastom* (of whatever form) instantly visible to the rest of the congregation, and the shame they feel may goad them into Christian ceremonies.

Although affected by such sanctions, most people claim that the type of marriage ceremony is only truly important if a couple plans to separate. It is much easier to move from one *kastom* marriage into another, whereas if the marriage has been officially sanctioned by a church or the state, then disentanglement from marriage and subsequent remarriage

becomes more problematic. Only those holding high positions in the church tend to consider a church marriage as affecting the quality of a marriage. The majority of Honiarans claim that *any* type of marriage entails a set of obligations and prohibitions regarding kin and affines, as well as a shift in moral status. As it is mainly on separation that type of marriage ceremony becomes crucial to the majority of Honiarans, when discussing the dynamics of married life in this chapter, I shall not distinguish between those sanctioned by *kastom*, church or state.

Post-marital residence is by no means fixed or clear-cut. Its fluidity tends to reflect occupations and economic circumstances. In addition, choice of residence sometimes reflects the ethnicity of a couple, such that inter-ethnic marriages complicate decisions about residence. For example, many of my married informants in Honiara had previously lived at their husbands' homes, and at other places in the Solomon Islands in order to work. However, if people from a man's *hom* generally follow patrilineal inheritance rules, and those from his wife's practice matrilineal inheritance and descent, then it is often the case that they will have spent time living at her *hom*. This is in order to lay claim to involvement in local affairs, and thereby ensure their children will inherit some land from the wife's lineage. This becomes especially important if a husband hails from a densely populated area. One couple living in Honiara explained how they had chosen to establish a house at the wife's *hom*, as she was from resource-rich northern Santa Isabel, whereas her husband was from overcrowded Langalanga Lagoon, western Malaita. Most couples claimed that choice of residence was unproblematic for them, and generally based on pragmatic concerns. However, on occasion it transpired that some women had felt nervous at being expected to live at their spouses' homes, and some said that town was better for them, as it offered a compromise where neither themselves of their spouses would feel constrained by the gaze of affines.

Genealogies and genealogical memory

As discussed in the previous chapter, Solomon Islanders classify one another according to their ethnicity: this is particularly relevant when they plan and discuss weddings and marriages. In order to ascertain the rate of inter-ethnic marriage among my informants, and to investigate whether it was increasing, I worked with them to construct their genealogies. I focused on their siblings, cousins, uncles and aunts, rather than their grandparents and ancestors. This was for two reasons. First, because I was interested in obtaining a large body of information, the high number of children per couple meant that I could do this purely by looking at siblings cousins, uncles and aunts. Second, I soon found that people's genealogical

memory stopped at their grandparents or great-grandparents,[1] unless an ancestor was remarkable as a foreigner or member of a different ethnic group. My informants told me that if I wanted to more information, then I should speak to older people still living at home who remembered genealogies going back many generations. They added that while some community leaders may possess detailed knowledge of genealogical histories, the majority of people did not. Furthermore, Honiarans claimed that their siblings and cousins were the primary influences in their lives, unlike their ancestors who belonged to a different epoch and followed different life-styles in *taem bifor* ("time before"). They often said that ancestors had little bearing on their current actions or values: although this seems challenged by their selection of ancestors' names for children; by meticulous tracing of genealogical histories during land disputes; and by the role of ancestors as protective ghosts or as present in dreams (see Akin 1996*b*; and Chapter 4). While immediate kinship and descent is important in ascribing ethnicity, the lack of focus on the more distant past seems to bear out Jourdan's (1995*b*: 144) claim that Honiarans are primarily future-orientated.[2] This orientation also explains why although most people could only trace their genealogies as far back in time as their grandparents, they often possessed detailed knowledge of their siblings and cousins.

From 23 genealogies, I gathered information about 685 marriages. To avoid imposing my own definitions of ethnicity, I have classified a person's marriage according to whether my informants themselves saw their relatives' spouses as from their own *hom* ("home") or from somewhere else. If a spouse has one parent from *hom*, I also classified that union as one between two people from the same *hom*. I also investigated how people had met their spouse and where they lived at the time when I collected the information.

Out of 490 marriages consisting of my informants, their siblings and their first cousins, 183 (37.35%) of them were between people from different "homes". This is a dramatic rise from the previous generation. My informants described a total of 195 marriages consisting of their parents and their parents' siblings: of them, only 24 (12.31%) were marriages between people from different "homes".

Although I make no claim for statistical significance of these figures,[3] the results are

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[1] See White (1991*a*: 35) for a similar observation on Santa Isabel.

[2] This also seems similar to Carsten's (1995) argument that lack of genealogical memory among Malays is linked to a construction of kinship as focused on present and future links rather than the past, but is different in that Honiarans do place some emphasis on the past, albeit recent.

[3] These figures are drawn from informants in my pool of 26 households. However, I acknowledge that there are problems of generation here. The people who provided this information were aged between 23 years and their late forties, which is quite a broad range. Thus, in some cases, those marriages classed as the previous generation will be between people of roughly the same age as those classed as the previous generation in other cases. Nonetheless, when I was recording genealogies, I found the increase in the rate of inter-ethnic marriages from the previous to my informants' generations so marked, that I have chosen to use my figures here.

interesting as they bear out Honiarans' claims that inter-ethnic marriage has become more commonplace over recent years. The results show a striking increase in the rate of marriages between people from different homes from the generation of my informants' parents to that of my informants

Discussions about the genealogies also indicated that most people who married outside their group met their spouses while in education or working away from home. In this way, mobility for education is implicated in inter-ethnic marriages. However, this is not to deny the mobility of less educated people in the Solomon Islands. Chapman (1970) has discussed circular migration between the south coast of Guadalcanal and Honiara, and both Frazer (1985) and Jourdan (1995*b*) suggest that groups of young men congregating in Honiara can be understood as temporary migration patterns that continue the traditional *wakabaot* ("walkabout") movements of young men. Young women also migrate temporarily: especially to Honiara to work in houses as domestic "house-girls" (*hoas-gele*), or to Noro, in Western Province, to work in the fish processing factory. However, middle class migration is significantly different in character to such movements. In order to find good employment, and hence become middle class, both men and women are mobile for their education and subsequently for work opportunities. Their migration often lasts for long periods of time, and so they are more likely to meet spouses from other ethnic groups than those who migrate on very short-term bases for wage labour, or for *wakabaot.* The 1986 census of Solomon Islands shows a clear correlation between level of education and frequency of migration: such that the likelihood of being a migrant rose as level of education increased (SISO 1989*b*: 79. Table IV.15).

Courtship and marriage: Sarah's and Ruth's stories

Middle class Honiarans tend to debate the constitution of expedient behaviour in ways that indicate the emergence of a common middle class morality based on acceptance of ethnic differences. This may be connected to the predominance of inter-ethnic marriages within the middle class. As well as their mobility for work and education, the increasing value that they place on choosing their own spouse (see Rosi & Zimmer Tamakoshi 1993: 181) results in inter-ethnic marriages becoming increasingly common among the middle class. Inter-ethnic marriages serve as useful windows onto the dynamic between ethnicity and judgements about moral probity within the urban milieu. While it is important not to pre-define inter-ethnic marriage as problematic (see Breger and Hill 1998: 17), Honiarans themselves discuss the tensions that inter-ethnic marriages may cause. These are especially obvious when differences between *kastom* practices arise, for instance, if one member of a couple is from

an ethnic group who practice brideprice payments, but the other is not. Tensions are also more subtle, especially when Honiarans concern themselves with stereotyping of ethnic groups according to their sexual demeanour.[4] In this way, middle class dislocation from *hom* and relocation in *taun* affects the judgements they make of the behaviour of members of other ethnic groups, and of those who follow *hom* life-styles.

When a couple meets and decides to stay together, they undergo a series of status shifts: most importantly from being a *yang boe* ("young boy") to a *marit man* ("married man"), or a *yang gele* ("young girl") to a *marit woman* ("married woman"). This entails two elements. First, upon marriage, people undergo a shift in status regarding their sexual availability, often expressed through restrictions on their mobility. Second, people—especially women—move from seeing themselves as wholly a member of one ethnic group, to still belonging to their original ethnic group, but embroiled in the affairs of another. The transformations from *yang boe* to *marit man* and from *yang gele* to *marit woman* are important, as they entail shifts in moral position. Although courtship and marriage are processes, this shift in nomenclature is usually sudden: at the time of a marriage ceremony. The shift in sexual availability is cross-cut by ethnicity; the attitudes and tensions that accompany marriage indicate how Honiarans' evaluations of ethnic groups does not necessarily coincide with their evaluations of individual members of those ethnic groups. Whereas parents may believe that their child's potential spouse is a morally decent person in his or her own right, they may have to reconcile this with their view of all members of that ethnic group as immoral. Urbanites' particular ability to hold such apparently contradictory views reflects their ability to maintain ethnic stereotypes while simultaneously judging people according to more personal traits.

While few courtships run completely smoothly, those between members of different ethnic groups entail particular problems: especially those related to stereotypical views of other ethnic groups, and those related to brideprice, other exchanges, and morality. Two cases illustrate some of these problems: both Sarah from Tikopia and Ruth from a different ethnic group married 'Are'Are speakers from southern Malaita. Sarah's story highlights the tensions about morality between ethnic groups, and how decisions about the desirability of inter-ethnic marriages have become noticeably more lenient over recent years. Ruth's story about her recent engagement and marriage explains how brideprice may be adjusted to suit the practices of another ethnic group, and indicates a marked acceptance of the practices of

[4] Of course, such distinctions are diverse and variable to a certain extent. Rapport (1997) describes how "outsiders" and "locals" are classified according to moral demeanour in an English village, but how such distinctions are rather fluid.

different ethnic groups. Also, both of their stories illustrate the problems of changing status from being "young" (*yang*) to being "married" (*marit*).

Sarah, is a teacher who lived in Honiara at the time of my fieldwork. Originally from Tikopia, she stayed in a small house with her husband and four of their six children. She spent her early years on Tikopia, then attended primary school at an Anglican Church school on Nggela in Central Province. From there she went to teacher training college in Honiara. While at college in the early 1970s, she met her prospective husband, Ben: a Roman Catholic. While inter-denominational marriage has the potential to throw up a set of problems and tensions in itself, such tensions are extremely rare: *kastom* and ethnicity played a much larger part in the opposition of Sarah's Tikopian kin to the union. Here is her account of the situation:

> When I wanted to marry Ben, everyone [my kin] was really cross. They told me that I was breaking *kastom*, that only men should marry out. They said that different people [people not from Tikopia] didn't treat their women well, that they slept around and left their wives. They said that this brought disgrace and shame to the woman and to her relatives. That's why they stopped girls marrying out. It's different now though, they see that this isn't necessarily the case. Myself and my mother's first cousin [Sarah's MFBD] were the first girls to marry out from Tikopia. She married a man from Roviana [in Western Province], whom she met when they were both working in Honiara. It's because I was one of the first to marry out from home that I was given such a hard time by my relatives.
>
> Myself and Ben ran away together, but weren't officially married yet. Then the church administration posted Ben to teach in one place, and myself elsewhere. They did this because they knew how my relatives felt about the proposed marriage, so they tried to separate us too—I think they were frightened of my relatives and the Tikopian chiefs. But after he had been at his post for three days, Ben came by ship so that he could be with me. Then my relatives—especially my uncle [Sarah's MB] who was an Anglican priest—sent three policemen to separate us from each other. When the policemen came I was really cross at them I told them that we hadn't broken the law, but that *they* had. I even said to one of them, 'If he isn't fit to be my husband then who is? Are you?' He ran away in shame. I was really strong: like a rock. After I'd chased the policemen away with my words, my uncle came to see me. He told me off for talking disrespectfully to the policemen.
>
> During that time together, myself and Ben stayed on our own. We were frightened to go to the Tikopian settlement because of what they might say to us. Eventually though, people started to come to see us and to see what kind of a man Ben was. They saw that he was a good man—and they started to visit us more, bringing food and even money—I think to say sorry. Even my uncle conceded that he was wrong about Ben, but said that he had been trying to protect me. My uncle never got cross directly at Ben, being an in-law meant that he couldn't according to our *kastom*. My sisters had been cross with me too, but my brothers didn't say anything to me as it was prohibited [according to *kastom*] for them to chastise me about it.
>
> After there, we were transferred to teach in another province, then we came back to Honiara. In 1973 we got married at Holy Cross in Honiara [Holy Cross Roman

Catholic Cathedral]. My husband's people pay brideprice, but we don't. So, they wanted to pay brideprice—they gave 150 dollars—which was a lot of money in those days, when a chicken only cost 90 cents.

Sarah said that her problems were commonplace during the 1970s, and she saw herself a ground-breaker. She claimed that her success in marrying a man from elsewhere paved the way for other women to marry out from Tikopia. By the 1990s, any similar disapproval was unlikely to result in relatives calling for police involvement. Sarah was also particularly proud of the strength that she showed in the face of police intervention, and of her vindication because of the success of her marriage. Her kin initially disapproved because they saw all Malaitan men as unsuitable husbands, particularly focusing on their supposed dubious sexual morality. Her kin only began to agree that Ben was a good, decent man after they became personally familiar with him. This is not to say that their view of all other Malaitan men changed immediately. The beginning of more lenient attitudes to out-marrying can also be linked to the growth of numbers of Tikopians not living on Tikopia. A period of increasing population pressure and subsequent cyclone-induced famine in the 1950s led to large numbers of Tikopians migrating through resettlement programmes to Russell Islands and Makira (see Firth 1959; Larson 1977). More recently, increasing numbers of Tikopians have come to Honiara. Although the resettled groups stayed in Tikopian settlements, this slowly enabled greater mobility and the potential to meet spouses from other islands. Previously, only men had left Tikopia, in order to become labourers elsewhere.[5]

Inter-ethnic marriage also raises issues more explicitly related to brideprice and compensation payments. Ruth became engaged and then *kastom* married to Paul, from the same area of Malaita as Ben, during my fieldwork. Throughout their courtship they had to resolve tensions about brideprice and compensation, which were largely the results of their different ethnic backgrounds and the actions of a wayward relative.

Ruth first met Paul in the mid-1990s, when they were working in the same province. They were both teaching at the time, but subsequently she moved to work in Honiara and he to Malaita. During that period, they only saw each other during school vacations when he came to visit Ruth in Honiara. He asked her to marry him, and she agreed. Paul wanted to pay brideprice to her relatives, but Ruth said that she would prefer if he did not, saying that it was no longer the *kastom* of her ethnic group, although it used to be. She added that if he paid brideprice, then it would be difficult for her to go and visit her own relatives, and she

[5] Rates of inter-ethnic marriage have increased markedly in Sarah's family: out of 12 of her aunts and uncles who ever married, only one married a non-Tikopian (he married a woman from Sikaiana, another Polynesian outlier). Of Sarah's own generation, out of 29 of her cousins who ever married, 8 of them married non-Tikopians (4 women and 4 men).

would be expected to live with him at his parents' place on Malaita. But he still wanted to pay, saying that his only brother did not pay brideprice when he got married, so he would like to pay at his marriage to ensure that the children are firmly located with his side of the family.

Although Ruth did not want Paul to pay brideprice, she said that it would be appropriate if he gave money to one of her older relatives, so that the relative could go and tell her other male relatives about the engagement. Paul met with Ruth's oldest uncle in town, explained the proposed marriage, and gave him SI$200.[6] They explained that money was to "send the news" (*sendem tok*) of the marriage. While all of Ruth's female relatives knew about it, they did not tell any of their male relatives or affines. It was important to Ruth that her brothers and uncles did not find out inadvertently about the relationship. Ruth explained that according to her *kastom*, if any of her brothers or uncles did find out then she would feel ashamed, and have to pay them compensation out of her own pocket. The couple expected the old uncle to pass small amounts of the money on to Ruth's other uncles and brothers in order to "send on the news". The uncle agreed to do so, but spent all of the money on beer and did not pass on the news. At this point, Ruth went to see him as she was extremely annoyed and alarmed. Her fiancé had to return to work on Malaita, and the matter was not resolved before he went. It looked increasingly as though her male relatives would find out through the incorrect channels. By the time the news was passed, Paul was already on Malaita. Ruth's relatives became angry with her for not sorting the situation out sooner so that they could see Paul "with their own eyes" (*weitem ril ae blo olketa*).

Eventually, Paul moved to Honiara to live with Ruth in a marriage marked by no other ceremony than the "sending the news" money. In 1998 they said that they had rough plans for a church ceremony at some point in the future.

To understand why Sarah's Tikopian relatives were so opposed to her proposed marriage, and why Ruth was so concerned about the issue of brideprice and the SI$200 "sending the news" money, their changing status upon marriage is central. For Sarah and Ruth, many of the problems surrounding their courtships arose from the transition they would face between ethnic groups.

Unlike Sarah, Ruth found that her relatives did not express so many doubts about the morality of Malaitans in general. In part this could be due to the increase in inter-ethnic marriage in recent years, especially as she pointed out that many of her relatives had married Malaitans. Both Ruth and her relatives were more concerned about the impact of a brideprice payment on Ruth herself.

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[6] In 1997, SI$1 was equivalent to approximately 20 pence sterling.

Filer (1985) points out the complex and often contradictory nature of Papua New Guineans' discourse about brideprice, and discusses the pressures that increasing amounts demanded for it place on the families of prospective grooms. The same can be said of Solomon Islanders: some claim that brideprice entails a commodification of females; others say that it does not; while others change their opinion according to circumstance;[7] and some contest that it should be seen as an equal exchange, during which shell money is reciprocated by food and labour. Crucially though, Filer shows that the brideprice issue "has a prismatic quality. It brings together all the bits and pieces of the Gender Question ... and lends them an 'economic' significance by confronting them with the laws of uneven capitalist development, and thus with the image of Custom as well" (1985: 167). In the Solomon Islands, the amount of a brideprice payment is usually negotiated according to several factors, which reflect the status of the bride. Status for brideprice is usually calculated according to the level of her educational attainment, her family's wealth, her previous marital history, and her sexual conduct as evidenced by motherhood. Furthermore, as it is often the case that one member of a couple is not from an ethnic group who conventionally practice brideprice, but the other is not, then ethnicity cross-cuts decisions about brideprice.

The impact of brideprice on a girl is also often cited as a factor in whether a bride and her family will accept brideprice. Ruth and her relatives were worried that the payment of brideprice would locate her too strongly with her husband's *saed* ("side"). This would curtail her freedom to visit her own relatives (*saed*), or to have them visit her, it also might mean that she would be obliged to move to Malaita which would further isolate her from her own ethnic background and *langguis*. Furthermore, if a brideprice payment was made, then any children she bore would also find it difficult to associate themselves with Ruth's *saed*, which she saw a potential problem for the future. She found that the personal morality in question was that of her own uncle, who spent the money on beer.[8] To others, she was visibly cross with him, but she would not express her anger to him directly. Although she felt that he had disrespected her and her fiancé, she shrugged her shoulders and said that there

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[7] Thomas points out that Fijians' equation of brideprice with purchase of women is "partial or perspectival" (1992: 320). He describes how men in rural Fiji are more likely than women to see brideprice prestations as payments, and how their assertions coincide with criticisms of other ethnic groups (Fiji-Indians) as more commercially orientated than they are. Honiarans' attitudes to brideprice are also perspectival and centre on ethnicity, but I suggest that they appear to be less consistent than those described by Thomas, not least because of the sheer complexity and quantity of inter-ethnic transactions in town.

[8] Beer drinking is an increasingly important medium for promoting male camaraderie in Honiara, as it is in most urban areas of Melanesia (Knauft 1997: 241). In 1996, the only brewery in the Solomon Islands, Solbrew, estimated a local market of 4,000,000 litres per year for its beer (*Islands Business* December 1996. #22: 53), most of which men consume in drinking bouts. Drunkenness is implicated in cases of domestic violence against women.

was little she could do about it, especially as he was an older male relative of hers, to whom she had to show respect. While Ruth did not see his actions towards her fiancé as outright rejection and dislike for him, she did see his actions as a disregard for Paul's good intentions to reconcile the practices of each of their ethnic groups by "sending the news" rather than paying brideprice.

As reluctance to pay brideprice is often due to relatives' wish not to see a girl become overly removed from their own ethnic and kinship group on marriage, then Ruth's older male relative's disrespect for her and her fiancé can be seen as result of Paul's position as an outsider. Although on marriage, women become embroiled in the machinations of another ethnic group, relatives are aware that they can never become a member of that ethnic group, and will always remain vulnerable outsiders.

As both Sarah and Ruth proposed to marry Malaitan men, they would come under the control of Malaitans.[9] Brideprice becomes an important issue where boys were concerned too, some people saying that they did not want their sons to marry Malaitan girls because they would be expected to pay costly brideprice. However, such assertions were often tempered by comments stating that it was dangerous to prevent people from marrying whom they wanted to, especially because of the risk of suicide, as I mentioned above. It is important to note here that suitability of a potential spouse is not only expressed by discussing ethnic identities, but a range of other factors too. For example, Honiarans usually mention potential financial stability and previous good character as two central issues. However, many Honiarans connect these other elements of a potential spouse's suitability to their ethnic background, by claiming an unavoidable link between them.

It was important to Ruth's male relatives that they saw her fiancé "with their own eyes". Visibility of a union enables relatives to show their approval of a choice of spouse, although this is usually done by lack of disapproval rather than any explicit expression of approval. In this way, visibility, whether prior to any ceremony or not, is part of the process of becoming married: from being *yang boe* and *yang gele* to *marit man* and *marit woman*. In a similar, although less ritualised way than the increasing visibility described in the courting rituals of Zafimaniry described by Bloch (1995*a*), this increasing visibility operates alongside spreading talk. Passing the word of the intended marriage enables the couple to become visible, and thereby to act as a couple in the presence of relatives, rather than meeting secretly, for instance, at one of Honiara's notorious motels. It is during the process of being talked about and seen by relatives that a couple's union may be either approved or

[9] In general terms, negative evaluations of other ethnic groups may include the perception that men insist that their wives work extremely hard, and may be particularly promiscuous.

disapproved of. Increasing visibility of a couple expresses marriage, and often serves to supplement or even replace more formal arrangements like brideprice exchanges, especially if there has been negotiation or debate about whether brideprice should even be paid. This was the case with Ruth: although *kastom* Are'Are marriages consist of a complex series of exchanges taking place over several years, Ruth and her husband decided to create a hybrid form of exchange exclusive to them. They followed elements of *kastom* that were common to both of them, but did not adopt the more extensive series of exchanges, not least because of Ruth's fears about removal and distancing from her own kin.

In addition to their claim that marriage with brideprice means a woman cannot visit her kin, Honiarans stress that marriage presents other limits on mobility. They say that these proscriptions are largely related to concern to control sexual conduct. For example, while parents (or guardians) usually allow young girls to congregate together in town to a limited extent, Honiarans say that married women should stay in to look after their houses, children and husbands, and should not act in a sexually available manner. To conform to the latter, women should not go to places where they will either be available, or where others will perceive them as available. For example, when women go shopping in town, then they should go about their business quickly, and then return to their houses. Of course, not all public places are rated in the same way: Honiarans say that attendance at casinos and night-clubs displays the highest degree of impropriety. As I discuss at length in Chapter 7, when married women go to casinos or (mixed-gender) night-clubs, many people say that they are behaving inappropriately.

However, despite saying that married women at such places are acting like sexually available girls, people also criticise unmarried girls for visiting casinos and night-clubs. They claim that morally upright young girls should not go to such places, as by doing so, they are open to the tempting influence of married men. They add that prostitutes and girls of loose morals are really the only frequenters of such places. The reasons why young girls should not be at casinos or night-clubs, rather than married men, highlights the fact that notions of appropriate morality are not only linked to marital status, but also to gender. Men do not find that marriage circumscribes their movements in the same way as it does for women: it is reasonably acceptable for both young boys and married men to hang around town, go to casinos and night-clubs. However, this is not to say that their behaviour once they are at these places is accepted regardless of marital status, as my later discussion of marital infidelity shows.

Wedding ceremonies

As I have already discussed, Honiarans do not adhere to any one particular form of wedding ceremony. However, when a couple opts for a church ceremony, then they do follow certain norms including clothing style, feasting, a wedding cake and gifts. When families are also involved in brideprice exchanges (particularly if there is Malaitan or Guadalcanalese involvement), then these usually precede a church ceremony. While weddings are only part of the process of marriage, their ceremonies and feasts are important because they make a marital union official in the eyes of church and law, as well as visible to kin and friends.

Visibility to friends and kin is particularly important, but the degree of visibility chosen by a couple often depends on their age and wealth. Older couples usually prefer to opt for smaller, more private ceremonies than young couples. This is especially true of those who have previously been married, or already have children. They say that a large ceremony and feast involving many guests is inappropriate for them; that they would feel "ashamed" (*sem*) at so many people witnessing their union in the light of their knowledge of the couple's personal (especially sexual) histories. Large ceremonies indicate prestige of the families involved, hence the 2,000 reception guests and ten-tier cake at Prime Minister Mamaloni's son's wedding in 1996 (*Solomon Star*. 9 October 1996. # 941: 1). Lavish ceremonies also connote a couple's lack of a marital and sexual past. Older couples express the shame that they associate with their weddings in terms of sexual purity, which is the same rationale used by many women to explain why they conceal their pregnancies.

To achieve the required degree of visibility, couples and their kin must decide what size of event to hold, and whom to invite. The inverse of this is that Honiarans say that it is important to attend weddings of kin and friends to which they are invited. If two or more important occasions coincide, then householders decide who should go to which event. When faced with a wedding and a funeral on the same day, one woman explained how she had instructed her daughters and niece to attend the wedding, while she and her husband went to the funeral. To sum up the division of her household members, she said: "*mifala split*" ("we split [ourselves]"). She tactfully explained—so that she did not show any disrespect for her relative who was getting married—that she saw the funeral as more important than the wedding, because it was that of an old, and therefore much respected, relative.

Church weddings for young couples are often lavish affairs, involving a service followed by a feast. Many affluent urbanites consciously emulate European style weddings: they buy or make white bridal gowns, pageboy's suits, bridesmaid's taffeta dresses and iced

wedding cakes (see plate 6 and plate 7).

Plate 6: Jango Fashion bridal shop in Chinatown.

Plate 7: "The heat makes the icing melt": a wedding cake in Honiara.

In this way, they display their wealth and cosmopolitan status. At one wedding that I attended, a "young girl" whose parents were from Malaita was marrying a "young boy" whose parents were from Temotu. Both were born and grew up in Honiara. In their early twenties, they had met, courted, and decided to marry with the approval of their parents. As people from Temotu do not practice brideprice, but most Malaitans do, the bride's family had not fixed a sum for brideprice, but had asked the groom to "pay whatever he could". In the event, the groom and his family had given SI$1,000 to the bride's family prior to the church wedding. One of the groom's aunts from Temotu explained that she disapproved of brideprice of any amount, but was glad that her nephew's fiancée's Malaitan relatives had been willing to accept a relatively low brideprice. She attributed this to the fact that they were showing acceptance of the Temotu *kastom* of not paying brideprice, which is no longer the norm, unlike in Malaita. Although she described Temotu *kastom* as not including brideprice, other people from Temotu explained that brideprice was an element of *kastom* there, and sometimes still took place using heavy coils of red feathers. In this way, the woman's comments indicate that *kastom* may describe current rather than past practices, and decisions about brideprice payments reflect such descriptions of the current constitution of *kastom* appropriate to ethnic groups. As I have mentioned above, these are combined with negotiations about the girl's education and previous (known) sexual conduct: a girl with a secondary education and no children commands a higher brideprice than one with little education and children.

The families of both sides incurred large expenses for the wedding. The bride's relatives made the frothy white bridal gown, pink satin dresses and shirts for the bridesmaids and groomsmen. Members of both families raised cash and labour to buy and prepare the food: they ordered a whole cow and several pigs to be killed and prepared into different dishes for the feast. Although the bride was a member of the South Sea Evangelical Church, and the groom was of the (Anglican) Church of Melanesia, the couple had decided to opt for a full Anglican service: a decision that they made easily and pragmatically. As I mentioned previously, inter-denominational marriages are rarely problematic, as people claim that denomination is less important than ethnicity (although the two are often connected due to patterns of missionisation). While some spouses change their church membership on marriage, many remain members of their church and decide easily which church to bring their children up in.

The Saturday afternoon service in the Church of Melanesia Cathedral lasted half an hour, during which time relatives and friends took many photographs of the couple at the altar and in the aisle. Relatives and friends of both bride and groom had bedecked the church

building with flowers from their gardens. They had also carefully prepared, printed and photocopied invitations and orders of service for the congregation, most of whom wore their best Sunday clothing. First, the priest conducted the exchange of vows and rings. This was followed by readings, then the priest's brief sermon, in which he claimed that Christian marriages were more tenacious than other forms. Although not mentioning *kastom* marriages directly, he carefully alluded to them by saying, "even before the time of Christ, marriage was a custom serving several purposes, particularly reproduction." He added that Christian marriages lasted longer than other kinds, and that marriage was for life: that, "a woman should not see another man and leave her husband," and vice versa. Furthermore, he said that if there were problems in a marriage, then a man must talk with his wife, not beat her. Through this, the priest acknowledged both the existence of widespread domestic violence, and the stance of the Anglican Church against it. After the sermon, a hymn and the signing of the register were followed by a short series of exchanges between the priest and congregation before newly weds and congregation made their way out of church and on to the reception.

The families had booked a nearby sports hall for the feast, and many women were so involved with preparations there that they did not attend the service itself. The church congregation walked to the sports hall, whereas one of the groom's cousins drove the newly-weds in a purple hire car, borrowed by a relative of the groom who worked for the Budget car hire company. The relatives had formally invited 250 guests, and had reckoned on about 300 attending once additional children came along with the adults. While at the service there had only been about 60 in the congregation, about 300 people attended the reception. The guests milled around, and some of the women helped to lay parallel long tables with dishes and saucepans of food prepared during a long night beforehand. Most family groups clutched plastic carrier bags containing brightly-wrapped wedding gifts, with their invitations attached to indicate the giver's identity. As the wedding party arrived, relatives of both the newly weds ushered them into the centre of the hall, where a garlanded top-table had been laid for them by women from both families. Opening pleasantries from the groom's uncle (by marriage) thanked everyone for coming, and told them that now they should file past the bridal party, shake hands and deposit gifts in a pile at the end of the line. The bride, groom, groomsmen and bridesmaids filed back to the head of the room, skirts rustling, girls' feet looking uncomfortable in tight court shoes. They lined up formally, and waited for their guests to come to them.

The crowd followed in slowly, and filed down the line to shake hands and offer their congratulations, then deposited their gifts in a pile at the end. It took a good fifteen minutes

for all to pass down the line before the bridal party could return to their seats at top table, and all the other guests to their seats or floor-space around the edges of the hall. Once the wedding party surmised that everyone had given their congratulations and gifts, the groom's aunt ushered the bridal party into the centre of the hall, and with the help of children, moved the heap of gifts to the centre. Standing behind the heap, the bridal party, their parents and aunts and uncles posed for anyone wanting a photograph of the group, before the bridal party sat at the top-table in the centre of the hall.

By this time, most people had helped themselves to one of the 600 green drinking-coconuts from coolers in a corner: young male friends and relatives of bride and groom used bush knives to hack the tops off the coconuts. The groom's uncle asked for quiet so that he could say a few words. He gave a brief speech saying that weddings were about men and women coming together in marriage, therefore the food tables would *not* be segregated according to gender. He explained that after he had said grace, it would be time for everyone to go for food. It was often the case that men and older boys were separated from women, girls and very young boys during wedding feasts, but not necessarily so. At some weddings, separating men and boys from women and girls showed respect for those Malaitans who followed *kastom* prohibitions about female contact with male's food. While the bridal party sat at a separate table where food had been laid out for them, guests had to go to buffet style tables for their food. On the word, the rush to the tables was phenomenal. Female relatives and friends of both bride and groom served the food, piling people's flimsy paper plates high with rice, sweet potatoes, cassava, savoury cassava pudding, beef, pork, curried chicken, fish, pineapple, water melon and cucumber slices. Food at wedding feasts is always special compared to everyday fare. Women filled their plates with enough to feed their children too, and walked back to their seats or floor space spilling food as they went. Eating in the Solomon Islands is rarely a time for chatting, focus is on silent consumption. Guests carefully wrapped their leftovers—often the large measure of a plateful—in the plastic carrier bags, which earlier held wedding gifts. Some preferred to take their food away with them, especially members of those ethnic groups who associated shame with eating. For instance, some girls will not eat in front of male kin or affines, instead they preferred to eat later, out of view.

Meanwhile, at their separate table, the wedding party had its own spread of food. It consisted of the same dishes, but this arrangement prevented the wedding party from needing to join the fray. At the end of their table stood a two-tier wedding cake, which the groom's mother took charge of, telling the bride and groom to come and cut it when they had finished most of their meal. As in church, and later in front of the gifts, a small cluster people

wielding their cameras gathered to capture the occasion on film, and applauded as the couple cut the cake then returned to their seats. The groom's mother took charge of dividing the cake into minuscule pieces to allow all the several hundred guests to have a taste. In this case a relative had made the cake, but a members of a small population of Fijian women are often asked to make and decorate wedding cakes, charging several hundred dollars for each one. Women started busying themselves walking around offering cake to everyone, and cajoled young girl relatives to do it for them. Guests added morsels of cake to their already burgeoned plates, but often only ate the icing, leaving the fruity interior for the rubbish heap. While people say that a cake is an appropriate and necessary part of a large town wedding, in fact most people do not like to eat it, especially the dried fruit. For this reason, cake-makers usually keep fruit content to a minimum, and the communal consumption of the cake takes place by way of the audience observing the cutting and receiving of a slice, rather than through their eating.

Speeches followed, as they do at most feasts. On this occasion they were in *Pijin*, as is the norm at urban events. The groom's uncle, and an older relative of the bride spoke about how glad they were of the union, thanking everyone for providing and preparing the food, and said how grateful they were to all the guests for coming to celebrate with them. The older man found himself prematurely curtailed by applause from young men at the sides of the hall as they thought he had already said enough. The crowd laughed at this, and he concluded his talk quickly. As is often the case at large events, his speech was barely audible: the performance of the speech taking precedence over its content. When the speeches had ended, guests started to leave in their family groups, until the bride and groom were whisked away in the borrowed hire-car car to their new house. Soon, the only people left were family members: men chatting in groups; girls clearing tables and sweeping the floor; women reclaiming their now empty pots and pans having cooked, served, but not eaten the food as they said they were too busy to do so.

The wedding feast is as important an event as the church ceremony. While the ceremony's role is to officialise a marriage in the eyes of the Anglican Church, the feast and associated speeches, photographing and gifts confirm the marriage to the eyes of kin and friends. Honiarans appeared to see the latter celebrations as paramount: more than five times the number of people attending the reception than the church ceremony. While this does not deny the importance of the church ceremony, it does show that this ceremony did not need to be witnessed by everybody, instead they had to attend (or to send kin to attend) the reception. This is further reflected by the great amount of money and effort which families of both bride and groom put into reception feasts. Thus, it is not just the church ceremony that

transforms the couple from boy and girl to man and woman: the reception and any previous (brideprice) exchanges are also important. This explains why people see cohabiting couples as married even if they have not had a ceremony: they have been visible to their kin and friends as a couple, and so are treated as such.

Weddings in Honiara are complicated affairs, which bring together many of the concerns of the middle class. Their inclusion of wedding cakes, dresses and other accoutrements of "Western" weddings are overtly foreign in influence, but wholly Honiaran in execution. Negotiations of brideprice reflect concerns with adherence to *kastom* and avoiding offence or conflict. Involvement of large numbers of kin and friends in feasts provides an audience for the marriage, as well as for the wealth and generosity of the families hosting the events. During inter-ethnic weddings, involvement of two "sides" serves to mark the marriage as a peaceful alliance between members of two ethnic groups.

Descriptions of successful marriages

The presence of large numbers of people at wedding ceremonies is important. However, once a couple in town has started their married life together, maintaining the marriage is largely the responsibility of the couple of themselves. This reflects the fact that affluent urban couples tend to form discrete units relatively rapidly, by establishing their own households as soon as possible. People often explain that successful marriages must be worked at by couples themselves, and rely on models of marriage based on different but complementary roles of spouses alongside an ideal of nuclear family life.

Most people employ Christian rhetoric of individual responsibility to discuss their ideas of a good and successful marriage: they talk about communication, equality, partnership and complementarity of men's and women's roles within the household. Regardless of whichever body sanctioned their marriage, couples usually strive to maintain a successful marriage themselves. They enlist the support of relatives and friends only at times of crisis, or may look beyond family members for support by becoming involved in church counselling programmes, which have recently become available. For example, since the mid 1990s, the Roman Catholic church in Honiara has ran a "Marriage Encounter" scheme, which includes weekend workshops for married couples. Such programmes are usually based on the notion that marital strife is caused by lack of communication, and can be solved by husband and wife learning to discuss their problems with one another. One member of the "Marriage Encounter" group explained that it had taught her and her husband to write non-accusatory letters to each other about their concerns in a relationship. Letters were private to the couple themselves, they read one another's letters to obtain understanding and resolution

of potential and existing conflict.

Within their houses, many urban couples operate as units, although people explain that men and women do undertake different tasks (see Chapter 3). For many Honiarans, houses are focal points for good, harmonious marriages and the creation of small nuclear families in keeping with ideals presented by the media and church. However, the closed doors of houses also provide screens behind which couples may play their tensions out to the fullest: particularly those that are associated with infidelity and may ultimately lead to separation.

Crucially, urban discourse about choosing spouses and maintaining successful marriages emphasises the responsibility of couples themselves. Even the sermon at the wedding ceremony, which I discussed previously, focused on the couple's need to communicate well with one another, rather than emphasising the role of supportive kin networks. Furthermore, while Honiarans claim that people have always had a certain degree of say in their choice of spouse, stories such as those told by Sarah and Ruth about their courtships indicate that they also believe that freedom of choice is becoming more widespread.

Urban life-styles and urban morality: promiscuity, infidelity and blame

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, infidelity and sexual morality are pervasive elements of Honiarans' everyday discourse. While discussions that connect sexual behaviour to ethnicity are usually confined to private arenas, those that link it to urban life-styles are more open, and take place in the media as well as everyday conversations. Among my informants, such discourse often centred on the break-down of marriages due to infidelity. There are several ways to talk about adultery in *Pijin*. *Duim rong* ("to do wrong") probably has its origins in Biblical rhetoric, and always refers to adultery. *Go olobaot* (*lit*: "to go all about") is used to refer to all kinds of promiscuity, whether either of the parties is married or not. In keeping with prevalent valorisation of both Christianity and *kastom*, most Solomon Islanders see promiscuity and infidelity as morally reprehensible.

Many rural Solomon Islanders associate promiscuity with an urban life-style. They claim that town allows more (and invisible) access to other non-related people than villages (see Knauft 1997: 243); allows greater freedom because the sanctioning gaze of relatives is less present; and incorporates foreign life-styles, which are more sexually liberal than those of home. In addition, whether living in town or not, older people tend to be more disparaging of urban life-styles than younger people who have spent a greater proportion of their lives in

town and feel comfortable with its mores.[10] In general terms, many rural dwellers and older people living in town claim that the relatively wealthy urban middle class possess loose morals.

However, while such people claim that promiscuity and infidelity are primarily urban vices, most middle class Honiarans claim that incidences of infidelity are becoming more commonplace both in town and the provinces. This is probably connected to their fear of denigrating their own chosen life-styles as immoral (I discuss this further in Chapter 5). Although urbanites and rural people differ in their moral evaluations of home and town, their claims all rest on the assertion that infidelity is connected to distancing from *kastom* practices, a lack of church-going, and people's adoption of foreign ways. This is often expressed in concrete terms, for instance, clothing has become a potent symbol of changes in the valorisation of *kastom*, church and all things foreign. When I questioned one middle class Honiaran woman about her claim that infidelity was becoming more commonplace, both at home and in town, she said:

> These things are just as bad at home [as in town], this is because many young girls wear trousers and see-through lavalavas [fabric wraps] outside the confines of their own houses. When I was a young girl, our skirts always had to reach past our knees. A 'women's interest' speaker came to our home and told all the women to always dress 'properly' inside and outside their houses, and to encourage their husbands to do so as well. They said this would encourage their house-girls to dress modestly and thereby husbands would not be tempted by them if at any point they were alone together in the house. The speaker explained to the women that it is up to them to act properly to prevent their husbands from straying with house-girls.

In this way, people say that both men and women should take pragmatic steps to try to maintain their marriages. In Chapter 3, I discuss urban households as arenas wherein marriages may succeed or flounder, not least because of how women comport themselves within their bounds, especially with regard to house decoration and their attitudes towards affines.

Honiarans' everyday concern about rising rates of infidelity translate into the media and popular culture. Recently, a series of letters appeared in the *Solomon Star* newspaper, which were sparked by a letter arguing that vehicles should be prohibited from having darkly tinted glass windows, as it was behind these that "married men" conducted relationships with "other women" (*Solomon Star* 23 May 1997. # 1020: 4). On the lips of most Honiarans in 1996, the song, "Noodle Hair" by Solomon Island pop group, Pacific Junction, lamented the

[10] See Gewertz and Errington (1991: 107-111; 1996) for similar observations of the difference between old and younger Chambri's description of urban morality in Wewak, Papua New Guinea.

loss of a girlfriend to a married man, blaming the lure of the man's money over the girl:

You look really nice
I adore you
Your hair is tied back and you wear trousers
I adore you, yes I love you
I didn't know that you're a married man's girl

Oh girl why do you want a married man?
No comment—money's talking
Even though I'm a *masta liu* [layabout] I'm good too.

Your sweet voice breaks my heart
I want to hang myself from your noodle hair
But what I do know, this married man is lucky
You know, now I won't want you anymore.

The song precipitated a letter in the *Solomon Star*, which argued that it highlighted the importance of marital fidelity (*Solomon Star* 13 May 1997 # 1015: 4). In the discussion about tinted-glass vehicles and the song's lyrics, adulterous liaisons are associated with the wealth of married men and their urban life-styles. People say that wealthy married men are the most likely to commit adultery, especially with young girls. They say that this happens for three main reasons. First, wealthy men are able to lure girls with promises of money and gifts. Second, this translates into girls' attraction to those men with wealth and associated prestige. Third, Honiarans say that wealthy men not only possess money, but also foreign morals, so that their self-interested acquisitiveness for things cannot be separated from their acquisitiveness for sexual liaisons.

Ethnicity, foreignness and blame for infidelity

While public debates about morality cite urban circumstances and wealth as key to understanding morality, these factors are cautiously nuanced by concern with ethnicity. Many Honiarans point to specific ethnic groups as hardworking and particularly adept at mobilising their *wantok sistem* to accrue business or employment success and wealth, which in turn enables adulterous liaisons. Because of this, male sexual promiscuity must been seen as an element of ethnic stereotyping. However, it is also important that such associations with ethnicity are always made "quietly" in private: in whispering confines behind closed doors. Such assertions are *never* made in public arenas, where a member of the ethnic group in question might overhear.

People make similar connections between gender, wealth and ethnicity when they discuss prostitution, and describe it as detrimental to marriages. Many Honiarans claim—

whether truthfully or not is immaterial—that most prostitutes belong to a certain ethnic group. Honiarans make a subtle but strong distinction between professional prostitutes and young girls looking for a good time, although this is not to say that girls do not move between the two groups, nor in and out of stable relationships. Using evidence from Daru in his extensive and compelling work on prostitution, Hammar makes a similar point, writing that categories such as "prostitute", "wife", "boyfriend" and "customer" are "unstable" (Hammar 1996: 214). Like in Daru, a significant number of females in Honiara make a living by regularly soliciting for sex. In particular urbanites say that "young girls" prostitute themselves to Solomon Islanders, expatriates and Asian seafarers: urbanites call these girls *dugong* and, more recently, *kontena* ("container"). The former term refers to the renowned romantic nature of female dugongs: a species of marine mammal; while people explained to me that *kontena* referred to these girls' supposed housing in empty shipping containers at Ranadi industrial estate (although in other circles, the term may have had more explicitly sexual overtones).

The situation is complicated by the numerous young girls who engage in relationships with married men that they do not perceive as professional, but explain in terms of love. However, in their moralising judgements about such girls, many Honiarans claim that the girls *do* receive financial recompense from the men. In fact, the men may not give them much other than a few beers at a night-club. If girls engage in several such relationships, then people will also refer to them as *dugong* or *kontena*, but less consistently so. Importantly, when Honiarans discuss professional *dugong or kontena*, they always imply that these girls are morally dubious because of their own volition, whereas they say that non-professional *dugong* or *kontena* are tempted by married men with money, and that responsibility for the moral wrong-doing lies with the men rather than the girls. In this way, people usually construct girls as passive, and blame men for any wrong-doing. In the Pacific Junction Song, the debate about tinted glass vehicles, and discourse about *dugong* and *kontena*, men are almost always reported as in the wrong, while girls are (almost) innocent victims, unable to resist the lure of money. Many Honiarans claimed this to be the case, often connecting the lure of married men over young girls to their attendance at night-clubs and casinos (see Chapter 7).

Whether the professionalism of prostitutes, or young girls seemingly swept off their feet by the promises of married men, people see all such sexual relationships as opposed—and therefore detrimental—to stable, monogamous married life (see Knauft 1997: 243). However, although money is often implicated as the cause of such relationships, what is actually *wrong* is the (illegitimate) breech of marital ties rather than any exchange of sex for

money *per se*.

In their everyday, private discourse, Honiarans often linked adulterous relationships to ethnicity by referring to the ethnicity of both parties. In one case, friends and relatives said that a man from one particular ethnic group was constantly having affairs. Women whispered about him, saying that he had "special magic" (*spesol samting)* which made women want him. They ascribed his possession of love magic to his ethnic origin, saying that people from that group learn particularly efficacious magic from one another and possess powerful magical substances. His wife was from a different ethnic group, and constantly argued with him about his infidelity, and because of this they had they had separated several times over the years. While both were living in Honiara, a group of men from another ethnic group came to town asking the man for compensation. They said that their married sister had become obsessed with him and "called out for" (*krae fo*) him.[11] They claimed that he must have knowingly done magic to make her want him, and that she had been calling out for him. Whether or not they had actually had an affair was immaterial: the problem was one of the man's intention, which was made overt by the woman calling out. In particular, they saw the fact that he wanted to have relations with this woman as constituting a violation of the woman's marriage. The man paid the compensation money, and the matter was considered settled for the time being. In this way, people were just as concerned with potential as actual adultery, such that imagined sexual misdemeanours were as serious as physical ones. They understood intent as not only evidenced in behaviour (see Strathern 1988: 117), but also construed it as tantamount to action.

Ascribing infidelity to the power of magic takes blame away from women: their situations are beyond their own control. Women and girls who have experienced the potency of such magic themselves, or who have seen their sisters and friends under its influence stress the almost frightening involuntary nature of the desire it inculcates. However, love magic is not the sole preserve of men. Women also practice *grin lif* ("green leaf") to attract males, especially *yang boe*, although people say that women are far less likely to use *grin lif* than men. *Grin lif* practices comprise use of certain efficacious plants: a person may gather leaves and carry them inside their bag, or they may put the leaves underneath the pillow of the person whom they desire. Both practices will cause a warming of the heart toward the practitioner. While *grin lif* is usually seen as fairly frivolous, it is not always innocent, and may have more sinister affect: magical practices have been implicated in several cases of the rape of groups of girls at boarding schools

[11] Had neither of them been married, then her brothers would probably have come to ask the man to marry her.

By blaming adultery on the power of magic, responsibility for the act is taken away from one party. In this way, when a man is said to have used *grin lif* on a girl or woman, her moral standing is protected. For a man to possess knowledge of *grin lif* implies that he has the power of magical knowledge. In the above case, compensation was required as restitution for the potential adultery caused by the man's magical powers. His possession of magical powers enhanced his social standing among his male friends, who were impressed to the extent of wondering whether they should ask him about how to obtain such magic for themselves. The woman was vindicated as an involuntary party in the potential adultery, and thus lost no kudos herself. Also, because men are believed to exert such strong influence over young girls, whether through magic or money, then unmarried girls threaten married men's fidelity. Thus, unmarried girls also become threats to married women's status in the household and many woman cite this as a reason to employ their husband's sisters as house-girls rather than their own, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

In a similar way to this, many Honiarans said that girls from *certain* ethnic groups neither dress nor behave in keeping with what they perceive to be the moral order: politely saying that they have "different notions of privacy to us". Instead, such girls wear short skirts and have no qualms about frequenting night-clubs and drinking beer. Men who had worked in certain provinces returned with tales of sexual looseness of the girls and women there. They portrayed the latter as the most shocking thing of all, and cited this as a reason why they would never allow their sons or daughters to marry anyone from there. This however, is quite different to earlier comments about responsibility for relationships between a married man and a young girl as caused by his money or magic. Honiarans said that girls and women from such ethnic groups were different to others, responsible for their own actions because of their *kastom*. On occasion, people said that such girls and women acted in this way because of their lack of *kastom*, saying: "they don't have *kastom*" (*olketa no garem kastom*), meant as a pejorative claiming that they existed in a completely amoral state. If a woman from elsewhere behaves badly in this way, then she is said not to be adhering to *kastom* (*hem no folowem kastom blo olketa*). Implicating *kastom* in this way brings ethnic identities to the fore.

People generally believe that married women are less likely to engage in adulterous affairs than married men. When they do—whether with married or single men—then others judge them as acting with less propriety than men in similar circumstances. Such infidelity is so serious that it does not just result in separation and divorce, but can also cause illness and death. In one case, a woman ascribed the death of a new born child to the child's mother's adultery. It was not just the infidelity which caused the death, but—the story teller

explained—the death was also "payback"[12] for the woman's propensity to gossip maliciously. In all ways, the woman was represented as less than moral. Some people claim that men's infidelity can also have physical affect, but these are notably less severe than those precipitated by married women's infidelity. For example, some say that a husband's sexual behaviour may affect the intensity and duration of their wives' labour pains in childbirth.[13] One woman explained that at her *hom*, if a man did not confess to his wife of his infidelity, then her labour would be long and painful. Because of this, at the local maternity ward, men often came in to confess to their wives to ease their pain of delivery. The woman proudly explained that her own labour had only been one hour, which showed the probity of her husband and the success of their marriage. Such beliefs are associated with particular ethnic groups: the woman who explained this was from an area in Western Province, and people from other groups agreed that they had heard of the belief, but did not adhere to it themselves.

Resolving infidelity and saving marriages

In their attempts to avoid the destruction of households and bodies, both church and *kastom* offer solutions to infidelity. Depending on the denomination and attitudes of individual clergy, churches may offer counselling services, encounter groups or publicly shame straying couples by barring or discouraging them from attending church, or taking the Eucharist. Such sanctions are similar to those that some denominations impose on couples who are *kastom* rather than church married.

Kastom (magic) is more discrete, and urbanites rarely admit to one another that they have employed it. They explain that may be for one or more of several reasons: because they feel ashamed of using an "un-Christian" method; because publicising their use of *kastom* may render it ineffective; or because they are ashamed to admit their partner's infidelity. In particular, women's shame about husbands' infidelity stems from their fear that they were responsible for it by not providing for men's needs or wants, for instance, by not providing a suitable house (I discuss this further in the next chapter).

Kastom enables people to "bring back a husband/wife" to them (*bringim baek hasban/waef*), and hence restore and repair their marriage. More extremely, Honiarans may employ *kastom* to "spoil" (*spoel*) a spouse who has "done wrong" (*duim rong*). Generally, people seeking *kastom* solutions will find a renowned specialist to help them. Such

[12] Melanesian "payback" does not necessarily accrue to the wrong-doer, and tends to by cyclical in nature (see Trompf 1994: 442).
[13] Hogbin (1965: 89-90) describes a similar situation where *Kaoka* speakers of Guadalcanal claimed that a woman's adultery causes a problematic confinement.

specialists do not offer free service, but the cost usually depends on the recipient's ability to pay, and may consist of either cash or goods. When a *kastom* practitioner "does magic" (*mekem*) on a person or gives them "medicine" (*meresen*) to use, the recipient must pay in order to make that magic or *meresen* efficacious. *Meresen* often works by way of analogy. To bring an errant spouse back, one *kastom* practitioner advised customers to place pieces of bark, which he had given them, in their mouths while they conversed with their spouses, this would be "swallowing their words, and swallowing their heart" ("*swalowim tok blo hem, iu swalowim hat blo hem*"). *Kastom* practitioners also offer advice on how people may prevent their spouses straying in the first instance: how to make them "*stap kwaet*" ("stay quietly") with their spouses and not even think about adultery. Alternatively, other practitioners offer magic which would make husbands impotent with anyone except their wives.

Honiarans' use of *kastom* practitioners to repair marriages is akin to their use as medical practitioners: *kastom dokta* ("custom doctors"). Although people may seek help from practitioners of the opposite sex, when consulting them, they will not allow anyone else of the opposite sex to be present. Healing or solving problems is always based on the removal or realignment of the cause of the problem, rather than a masking of the symptoms. Importantly, Honiarans are happy to consult specialists who are not members of their own ethnic group, not least as they claim that people from certain ethnic groups are especially adept at this kind of work. This said, *kastom* methods are often a last resort for urbanites, who would prefer to resolve marital problems through the "communication" and "support" that I discussed as an element of successful marriages.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have described forms of marriage, weddings and explained how marriages are maintained, threatened and repaired. I have shown how concerns with urbanisation and ethnicity are expressed in these processes, in particular as people claim that urban life-styles, gender and ethnicity are intertwined with moral probity. Of course, these categories and the connections between them are neither static nor unidirectional, rather they influence and are influenced by one another.

The increasing popularity of inter-ethnic marriage among the families of my informants highlights how ethnic stereotypes are maintained, but tempered by increasing acceptance of others. However, although many people are competent at negotiating brideprice between ethnic groups, tensions still arise that reflect people's concern with ethnic alignment, and their futures. In addition, the prevalence of public discourse about urban morality indicates that concern about sexual morality is extremely high. Such discourse

connects a perceived rise in immoral behaviour to rejection from *kastom*. However, whereas rural people claim that Honiara is an immoral space, Honiarans say that practices are the same as at home. I would postulate that this difference rests of urbanites' attempts to reconcile the insecurities of town life with their wish to stay there. If they were to agree that moral decay was a solely an urban phenomenon, then they would no longer feel justified in maintaining their urban, independent life-styles.

In the previous chapter, I described how ethnicity is a central mode of classification and description for Honiarans. However, here I have explained that while the morality of urban life-styles may be the subject of public discussion, people do not associate morality with ethnicity in public arenas. The inflammatory nature of moral judgements would be so severe that they remain tacit undercurrents in public, but are still emphasised in private discussions.

Of course, not all moralities are sexual in nature, but here I have emphasised the sexual kind, because they are so foregrounded in Honiarans' discourse about urban life and marriage. Knauft (1997) explains that such concern may reflect altered gender relations in Melanesia which accompany moves away from "traditional" life-styles, such that men must engage in the cash economy, and women's freedom becomes increasingly threatening to them. Control of sexuality becomes increasingly important in an insecure urban milieu. In Honiara this translates into a sense of worry and incoherence, which stem from attempts to negotiate as *kastom*, ethnicity and their aspirations to modernity. In this chapter, I have tried to tease out some of this incoherence, to show how affluent Honiarans manage their situations in their attempts to secure and maintain successful marriages. In the next section, I describe how such marriages form the basis of households, which offer security in the urban milieu, alongside independence from home.

The bonds created by marriage do not exist in a vacuum, but serve a basis for households and wider connections with kin and affines. I will explain how Honiarans claim that the maintenance and independence of nuclear families is a feature of the life-styles of affluent urbanites. Through this, I show how an emerging notion of discrete households serves as a bridge between the tensions between married couples and those with and in the wider world. In turn, I explore how urbanites manage their inter-household visits in order to paradoxically assert both difference and connection to kin and home, which furthers their membership of an urban middle class.

Section Two: Chapter 3
Privileging households, distancing from home

This section continues to examine Honiarans' manipulation of their ethnic and urban identities, by showing how they construct households and visiting relationships in ways that signal their distance from the demands of home, and their involvement in a network of cosmopolitan urbanites. Rowlands (1994: 155-156) suggests that "success" must be approached in local terms, and describes how success of the elite in Cameroon rests on their ability to make redistributions to kin, and hence remain connected to them in order to avoid the threat of sorcery. Success for middle class Honiarans takes slightly different forms, it consists of their ability to maintain integral households based on nuclear family units; to engage in sociable actions when visiting one another; and to achieve a subtle distance from home. In these three chapters, I show how urbanites achieve this success, particularly by downplaying ethnic differences in public, overriding them in inter-ethnic friendships, but concurrently using ethnic stereotypes to discuss others in pejorative ways. The dynamics and complexity of Honiarans' situations are compounded by the fact that while achieving distance from home, they simultaneously want to keep a degree of attachment, which—while often predicated on a claim that they wish to return home at some point—also enables them to be visible to their relatives as successful urbanites who are conversant in the rules of interaction for affluent, urban lives. These rules are akin to a Honiaran form of "polite society",[1] wherein quietness is key, and freedom is tacitly constrained by the desire to retain some connection to home.

In this chapter, I explore how middle class Honiarans construct their domestic arrangements in order to consolidate their standing as cosmopolitan urbanites. They construct their house spaces, in order to display their wealth and establish stability and prestige; as Trompf asserts: people "advertise" their wealth and thereby their "security" (1994: 450). Honiarans also establish themselves through relationships fostered in (and between) houses. For instance, they must reconcile practices of kinship and work in their treatment of domestic helpers: house-girls (*haosgele).*

In particular, members of the middle class stress their need to maintain the integrity of their households both economically and morally. This is reminiscent of Gudeman and Rivera's (1990) description of "house economy" in Columbia, where people strive to

[1] Carrier (1995*a*: 163) describes Girouard's (1990) portrayal of Georgian English society as "polite", whereby "polish" was an important part of sociality. "Polish" disguised enmities, particularly political differences. In Honiara, the enmities to be overcome by the middle class are those of ethnicity.

maintain their "houses" in ways that complement, yet are different to, their maintenance of "corporations" through market relationships. In Colombia, hoarding is central to the household economy, which is based on kinship, whereas investment is key to the corporate economy, which is based on individual relationships mediated by market norms. Honiarans also emphasise that their households are based on kinship, however, these are primarily relationships with immediate family members. In addition, households are also constructed by relationships with other urban households. By orientating themselves towards the needs and demands of their nuclear families, Honiarans can move away from privileging the wider kin group. In this way then, while they emphasise kin values in households, they also manipulate households to distance themselves from wider networks of kin.

However, this shift in orientation involves a certain degree of tension, as members of households balance the demands of their immediate families with those of their wider kin. In this chapter, I begin to unpack some of these tensions, in particular by examining householders' negotiations with house-girls, long-term guests and visiting affines. I conclude with a discussion of the restrictions placed on movements of household members, which show how the autonomy of households is influenced and controlled by the urban milieu of strangers. I continue themes of movement in the next two chapters, when I discuss visiting between households.

Households are constituted by a dynamic between actions that build them up (construction, habitation, sociability) (*mekem:* "making"), and those that break them down (destruction of property, rejection of visitors, violence and threat) (*spoelim*: "spoiling"). This section is framed around the ongoing dialectic between building-up and breaking-down households. These processes involve physical houses themselves and the social relationships that occur within and beyond their walls. This is why households can only be understood as sets of dynamic relationships: between houses and people; between households; and not as "indivisible unit[s]" in themselves (Carrier and Heyman 1997: 363). The ebb and flow that makes up households is part of a process whereby Honiarans manipulate household dynamics in order to create nuclear family structures and thereby middle class life-styles.

Housing in Honiara

As I have already discussed, Honiarans rarely use the term "home" (*hom*) for a house in town, instead they reserve it for their natal (or parents' natal) islands. Honiarans refer to their houses in town unequivocally as "house" (*haos*). They talk about houses and concomitant households by referring to the name of the suburb, or by allusion: that their house is "on the other side" (*lo nara saed*) or "above" (*antap*). Many houses are not owned by the people who

live in them. Instead, they are owned by government ministries; private companies; or by individuals who rent them out. Often, employers provide low-rent housing as part of work contracts, this is especially true for high status jobs. If a family owns a house in town, but is provided with alternative accommodation, they rent out their own house, supplementing their income to pay for house-loan repayments and other family expenses.

Historically, missionaries had a crucial impact on changes in housing design, as they replaced varied dwelling arrangements with more standardised housing.[2] For instance, Scheffler describes pre-missionised housing on Choiseul as usually providing accommodation for a married couple living with their parents (1965: 26). Burt (1994: 56-58) and Hogbin (1969: 17) write that "traditional" housing on Malaita allowed for clear segregation of the sexes, unlike most of the housing of more recent years. Replacement houses were constructed according to European ideals of individual dwellings for nuclear families: houses were raised on posts, with windows, shutters and had internal partitioning into rooms, allowing for a degree of privacy. As such, there has been a homogenisation of house-design across the Solomon Islands, and houses from different islands are only distinguishable from one another by minor details such as the amount of thatch, rather than by major structural differences. With the exception of recalcitrant Kwaio highlanders (Keesing 1992: 23), at the time of my fieldwork, villages in the Solomon Islands mainly consisted of close-knit groups of houses, each of which provided living-space for a couple, their children and sometimes close unmarried or widowed relatives. While such arrangements seem similar to urban ones, the ebb and flow between houses in villages is rather different to the nuclear family arrangements in town, which I describe in this section. Many of those in their middle age or older remember growing up in rather different accommodation. For instance, a middle aged woman pointed out a house on display at Honiara's National Museum, and explained how she had grown up in a similar one, complete with an earth floor and raised sleeping platform.[3]

The rash of building work in Honiara is a new phase in housing change, and is largely a response to the financial benefits of house ownership, but also indicates people's

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[2] See Rensel (1997*a*) for a discussion of housing change in the Pacific: particularly the notion that there has been such thing as static housing patterns at any time in Pacific history. These trends in Solomon Islands reflect their discussions of housing change throughout the Pacific often partly fuelled by the desire of missionaries to ensure that men and women did not live apart as was conventional at times of initial missionary contact (1997*a*: 19). See also Jolly and MacIntyre (1989) for a description of these changes throughout the Pacific, and Waterson (1990: 38- 40) for a discussion of the changes in housing styles wrought by missionaries in their hope of establishing Christian ethics in South East Asia.

[3] The national museum has a display of *kastom* housing, one representing each province. Despite this woman's comments, many middle class urbanites find the display not overly interesting, but on occasion rather quaint.

moves to create more permanent connections with the urban milieu. Both of these bring independence from kin. A family renting out their house can make several times the cost of the loan repayments, so they make a reasonable profit. Even if a family occupies a government or company house for which they pay nominal rent, they still might opt to build their own house as a sound investment. They can rent it out while still living in their employer's house, and look forward to a secure investment for their retirement, if they are considering staying in town. Building a permanent house is a way of ensuring the longevity of an income for families and their children. While building or purchasing a house does not necessarily imply a belief in the permanence of one's stay in town, it does serve to consummate connections with a town life-style, beyond those that are purely transient.

Honiarans generally arrange to have houses built for them by professional builders, usually preferring to employ their kin, or at least members of their own ethnic group, joking about making the most of the *wantok sistem* ("*wantok* system"). This is less due to a desire to have control over their layouts, than because it is generally much cheaper to build a house, than to buy one that is already complete. Most ready-built houses on the market are large, with prices aimed at the wealthy expatriate and corporate clients. However, recent demand for housing has spurred construction companies to build small estates of low-cost housing for sale at the edges of the town's suburbs. For instance, the A.E. construction company built a housing estate in Naha, which provided low cost housing for private buyers, and proved popular despite delays in connection to amenities.[4] Demand for these houses far outstripped supply, further underlining that many people choose to build because of the lack of availability of affordable ready-built housing.

However, many Honiarans do not own the houses in which they live. As most housing is tied to employment, many middle class people find themselves compelled to move house whenever their job changes. Even if someone works in the same job for many years, some employers still ask them to move house in the interim. Many people resent this transience, claiming that they try to resist it as much as possible. Women say that they encourage their husbands to stay in the same job, and try to convince their employers to allow them to stay in their house for as long as possible. They say that the constant possibility of moving house makes them reluctant to put extra effort into getting to know the strangers who live next door, especially as becoming friends with neighbours would upset their children if they were uprooted to another area of town (I discuss the issue of neighbours in greater depth in Chapter 4). In this way, the stability and prestige achieved by a house made of permanent materials is adversely affected by Honiarans' work situations. In spite of

[4] *Solomon Star* 30 April 1997. # 1010: 10-11.

this, as I describe below, they do strive for stability and continuity through the fabric of their house, in the same way as the "transcendent" qualities of property among Trindadians described by Miller (1994: 136). However, they mainly do so through those elements that are either movable or easily obtained, such as house-decorations.

At the same time as many people build and rent houses in town, in their attempts to make their urban status more permanent, many are also involved in purchasing materials and organising building of houses at home. They see little conflict in this, as the house is a space that only becomes imbued with the life of a household by their residence. By sending materials and money for workmanship to their homes, affluent Honiarans say that they are planning for their future, and that they hope to return home when they retire. Whether they will eventually feel able to do so, in the light of their sense of alienation from *lokol* life-styles, remains to be seen. In the meantime, once they are completed, such houses do not remain empty. Instead, urbanites ask—or are asked by—their relatives at home, to live in them. If urbanites visit home for their Christmas holiday—often for over a month at a time—they usually expect their relatives to temporarily vacate the houses (see Chapter 4). The style of these houses at home is important, urbanites take care to send timber, fibre-board and corrugated iron for their construction. They say that they prefer houses made from these "permanent" (*pemanen)* materials, rather than "leaf houses" (*lif haos*) made from sago-palm leaves and timber as is the norm in rural areas. Urbanites provide two justifications for this: first, they are not at home to perform the regular maintenance that leaf houses need; second, they have become used to the higher levels comfort and ease of permanent houses, so want to enjoy those standards during their retirement. Both of these reasons reiterate their attempts to define themselves as more wealthy and sophisticated (less *lokol*) than their rural relatives. Although such Honiarans do not live in their houses other than for a few weeks holiday, just as they create real households in town through sociability and tensions, they also create ideals of future households at home.

By building a permanent house at home, a family may well be re-establishing or maintaining links with home, but the fact that they choose to build permanent rather than leaf houses is also a distancing technique: they are economically successful migrants who return home only on their own terms. Furthermore, they hope that their economic success will translate into higher social status at home. Often, this hope is fulfilled as rural relatives request their share of urbanites' resources, for example, by asking for money to pay for school fees and business exploits. Despite tensions over these demands, as the subjects of these requests, urbanites they say that their belief in their own high status is vindicated. In this way, status at home is acquired not only through life-style in town, but on how that life-

style is perceived as successfully transposed to home, a point that Strathern (1972, 1975) also makes with regard to Hagen migrants in Port Moresby.

Constituting households

In 1986, the Solomon Islands national census showed that there were 4,317 private "households" in Honiara, averaging 6.6 people per household (mean average) (SISO 1989*b*: 141. Table VIII.3).[5] Only 55.5% of people classified as household members by the census were parents and their children (SISO 1989*b*: 147. Table VIII.8), and census organisers defined "household" as "based on usual common eating arrangements" (SISO 1989*b*: 137). However, although census figures do show that many household members do *not* belong to the nuclear family units, the fluidity and dynamics of households means that such results do not provide a picture of the fluidity of household constitution, or the influence of affluence on households. During my fieldwork, it rapidly became clear that households are not static, but change their composition frequently. As Jourdan points out: "The composition of the household is very fluid and varies markedly through time; the size of the household may shift significantly" (1985: 73). Also, given the hierarchical nature of eating arrangements in many households, as I discuss below, census figures may not reflect the presence of younger female relatives and house-girls, and so do not describe how people conceive of their households' boundaries. A household is a complex interaction between people and space: households are sets of relationships. To enumerate them may be useful for discerning some overall patterns: such as the average number of people eating or sleeping under one roof, but tells us little about the meanings of relationships: between people within a household, and between people and their living space.

Married couples form the core of households, which also include their children, a house-girl (*haosgele*), and relatives staying in town for work or education, and other relatives who come and go. While census figures showed average household size in Honiara as 6.6 persons, they also showed that numbers ranged from 1 to over 15 persons per household. Among the 26 urban households that I worked with, the number of people resident in each household ranged from 4 to 15. The lower figure represents a couple and their 2 children; while the higher figure represents a couple; their 4 daughters; 6 "adopted" children; the husband's sister and father; and a house-girl. This latter case was quite unusual, most couples said that they tried to avoid allowing too many people in their houses, by

[5] The 1986 census defined private households as, "mainly groups of related people, but also included one person households and households of five or less unrelated persons", and defined collective households as, "groups of unrelated persons living together for a specific reasons." The latter category included hospital wards and prisons (SISO 1989*b*: 137).

which they meant that they preferred to live with their spouse, their own children, a house-girl, and only one or two other relatives. I discuss how they manage this below.

Processes that inform household composition itself are based on the themes which run through the thesis: desire for modern, urban, middle class life-styles as opposed to those associated with rurality and *kastom*. This is reflected in household organisation which stresses nuclear family ideals but must withstand considerable pressure when familial obligations mean that these ideals are encroached upon.

The importance of nuclear families

Couples usually say that the husband is the "boss" (*bos)* of the household, with ultimate control over expenditure and who may stay. Eating arrangements exemplify power structures within households: generally, household members organise themselves according to their status within the household hierarchy. Usually, women and girls make and serve food, always giving the male "boss" the largest portion. Any of his male kin who are visiting or staying at the time receive similar portions, and usually eat at a dining table or wherever he decides to seat himself. Older married male relatives of the wife, particularly her father; and certain high status individuals, such as clergy, are afforded similar respect by being given similar portions and eating in the same place as the male head of household. Young, unmarried male relatives of either husband or wife usually eat elsewhere, unless specifically asked by the male head to come and join them. Married women and their young children usually eat less food then the men, and sometimes do so separately. At the lowest end of the household's status hierarchy, the house-girl and any young girl relatives of either the husband or wife eat least, usually after everyone else, and in the kitchen where they are out-of-sight. House-girls say that they would feel ashamed to eat with everyone else, and that the large portions given to married and prestigious men shows respect for them. This is the general pattern regardless of ethnicity, and people explain it by referring to respect and shame, although people from Malaita tend follow this gender segregation more strictly than people from other islands.

Although these are general trends, some households make a particular effort to eat together as family groups at the same time. This seems indicative of their attempts to put nuclear family ideals into practice. Such ideals include family-orientated recreation, meals, and the exclusion of wider networks of relatives from everyday activities. This generally happens where there is little tension between husband and wife, some householders explaining it by saying that they are trying to show equality and respect for one another, and that they prefer not to follow *kastom* segregation according to gender and status. The fact

that they recognise eating together as non-*kastom* shows not so much a rejection of all things *kastom*, but attempts to foster practices in keeping with their notions of nuclear-family sociality.

Many well-educated Honiarans discuss the rise of nuclear family ideology in English terminology. A college graduate explained: "more people are now thinking of their nuclear families and self interest rather than extended families." She was ambivalent about this change, clear that "selfishness" was bad, but claiming that economic pressures of urban life gave people no option but to distance themselves from relatives at home. Similarly, many Honiarans adopt English terminology to describe their kinship systems. In particular, "tribe", "section" and "clan" have entered the everyday parlance of well-educated Honiarans via the education system (see Chapter 6).

As middle class couples in Honiara try to manage their circumstances, many engage in activities that they see as essentially foreign in origin, and as centred on their families operating as nuclear groups. The rise of the middle class family "picnic" exemplifies this behaviour. Families with access to transport make frequent weekend trips out of town: whether to public beaches, or to their second (holiday) houses outside the town boundaries. Ranks of privately owned and government vehicles line the beaches around Honiara at weekends and on public holidays. Bonegi beach, 10 miles west of Honiara, is the most popular place for an outing. The area's owners charge an entrance fee of SI$5 per vehicle, and provide parking space under plantation coconut palms near the beach. When families go, they usually take everyone in their household: the couple themselves, their children, the house-girl, and anyone else living in the house at that time. They bring food to cook by barbecue, soft drinks for the women and children and (sometimes) beer for the men. Trips to friends' or relatives' houses beyond the town boundaries involve similar activities, and also involve transporting an entire household to a different place. People talk about going on family picnics with pride, and say that they show the unity of their family groups, their self-reliance, and their affluence.

Financial arrangements within households also indicate an orientation towards nuclear family sociality. Honiarans generally only discuss the state of their household finances with one another to bemoan their lack of money, claming that their incomes are small, and the costs of living in town are high. This discourse is offset by their willingness to spend money on overseas trips, and purchase relatively expensive food and drink, as well as run vehicles and build houses. Male household heads usually have control over purse-strings, but this is by no means always the case. Exactly how families' finances are arranged is very much a matter of individual preference. However, common to most middle class households

is their attempt to focus their resources on their immediate family. Only when making a point about their wealth to relatives—such as through gifts and events, as I discuss in the following two chapters—do they spread their wealth out to their extended kin group.

While most households run their financial affairs as units, couples may have a degree of financial autonomy from one another. For example, many women collect empty bottles to collect their deposits, as a way of supplementing their household income, especially for expenditures linked to events like Christmas and birthdays (see Chapter 4). Bottles[6] constitute a savings scheme for women, which they say brings two benefits. First, they feel that they are contributing towards the household's financial needs. Second, those without paid employment say they do not have to ask their husband for money all the time, but have some degree of financial autonomy which enables to make their own choices about their spending, whether for everyday household expenses, special events, or gifts to friends and relatives.

Plate 8: New, expensive housing at Tasahe.

[6] So much so that in the latter months of 1996, the local brewery had to stop production of bottled drinks, because all of their returnable bottles were hoarded as Christmas savings schemes by households across Honiara.

Making middle class houses

Honiarans create and use their houses in ways that reinforce their construction of nuclear family sociality. Owning a house in town is a mark of economic success. However, economic success is not necessarily tantamount to social success: how householders choose to employ the house is also paramount. For instance, purchase of a piece of land in a prestigious area, such as Tasahe (see plate 8), shows that a couple has saved enough cash to pay a deposit and secure a bank-loan. However, what kind of house they construct, how they decorate it, and how they manage the relationship between that space and their kin is more definitive of social position and aspirations than their ownership alone.

In his discussion of the Kabyle house, Bourdieu (1990) describes the house as a space that becomes inscribed with meanings through practice. His initial analysis was a precursor to his focus on practice and his development of the concept of *habitus*. Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) use Lévi-Strauss's notion of house-based societies as starting points for their discussion of the house as an extension of the body, and as a space which must be seen not as separate to society, but as one which is intrinsically part of social interactions. They write: "It is out of these everyday activities [sharing, living, consuming] ... that the house is built" (1995: 45). Houses are not just arenas for social interaction to take place in, but are embodiments of those interactions. Honiarans' maintenance of houses, as well as their relationships and movements within and between them, makes them into spaces that reinforce people's ambiguous orientations towards home and town. The ways in which Honiarans use and alter their houses serve to erect boundaries and inscribe meanings in and around the household space. House and households are zones wherein married couples balance the demands of one another with those of their relatives, friends and affines.

Many middle class houses are described as "high" (*hae*), because they are built on stilts in the style of tropical Australian homes and elite colonial structures. Most contain at least two bedrooms, a lounge, bathroom, toilet room, kitchen, and veranda. Outside, most houses have a second kitchen, flower garden, vegetable patch, fruit trees, lawn, driveway, and sometimes a laundry area. Sometimes, floors are made of polished timber, but many say that they prefer to cover them in patterned linoleum. Women usually adorn the painted walls with hangings, appliquéd fabric and crochet decorations, which they also use to cover their locally-made timber or cane furniture. If their house is on a ridge, then householders usually allow the breeze to circulate by opening louver-windows, while keeping mosquitoes out by means of wire netting. Most people are proud of such houses, which are comfortable compared to those occupied by less well-off people. The only people who complain about

them are house-girls, because of the amount of maintenance that they require: large floor areas to sweep, louver windows to wash, and plenty of soft furnishings to launder.

Later in this chapter, I discuss some of the marital tensions and personal stresses that can arise from use of house space during affinal visits. I also discuss the fact that many middle class people manage the problems that a pre-designed house causes, rather than altering the fabric of the house itself. While I have described how this may be connected to the frequency of their house-moves; their construction from permanent materials; and the fact that that many urbanites do not own their houses, I also show how discourse about this reflects their ambivalence about their removal from rural life-styles.

Making middle class houses: *motu*

Using space outdoors is an important part of household routine, cooking in an outside kitchen is especially pertinent as it asserts links with *hom* life-styles, but transfers them to *taun*, where they become nuanced by tensions about cosmopolitan status. Outdoors, household work includes building and cooking in second kitchens; occasional barbecues (usually reserved for special occasions: see Chapter 4); tending flower gardens and vegetable patches; and making and maintaining pathways. Solomon Islanders use the outside as an extension of the house, as living space in itself.

Nearly every house in Honiara has an outside kitchen, which contains a hearth and an area for cooking with firewood. Such kitchens are usually small timber houses with iron or wooden roofs; walls to keep the wind away from the fire; but with open windows to allow in some light and air. Invariably these kitchens are high enough to stand up in and large enough to accommodate at least two people to attend the fire (see plate 9).

Cooking in the outside kitchen is usually women's work, just as it is indoors. However this does not preclude men from commenting on their cooking methods, and whether they have made a good job of cooking the fish, meat or chicken. Cooking on a hearth by the *motu* method is especially interesting, as it is an element of household routine that provokes much discussion and highlights Honiarans' attitudes to the life-styles of home. To make a *motu,* women make a fire from kindling, and cover it with round river stones until they are too hot to touch by hand. They allow the fire to die down, arrange some of the stones in a circle like a wall, then cover the stones with layers of banana leaves until there is a watertight basin. The women place the food—whether sweet potatoes, cassava pudding, meat, poultry or fish—directly onto the leaves, add coconut milk, and fold the leaf edges over the top (see plate 10). Next, they lay on some more leaves, so that the food is sealed in large parcel. Finally, using tongs, the women place the rest of the hot stones on top of the

leaf parcel, and seal the entire package with sturdy sacks and rice bags. The *motu* is left alone for several hours until the women reckon that enough time has passed for the food to be ready.

Plate 9: Outside kitchen.

Plate 10: Making *motu*.

Almost everybody says that food cooked in the outside kitchen—particularly by *motu*—tastes better than that cooked inside with gas, and they also value it because it saves paying for expensive gas canisters. This is despite the fact that firewood and the requisite leaves are relatively expensive at Honiara's markets, and they must buy them just as they do gas. Cooking by *motu* is a laborious and dirty process by comparison to gas-cooking indoors, so it is usually reserved for weekends and special occasions. Women only complain about making *motu* if they do not see that the occasion deserves such effort, for instance, if their husbands request *motu* for their families' usual evening meals on week-days.

Women make an explicit link between *hom* and *motu* cooking. They say that they have known how to make *motu* since they were young girls at home, where their mothers taught them. Women point out that although styles of *motu* kitchen are usually generic throughout the Solomon Islands, they describe food cooked by *motu* as (relatively) ethnically specific. This said, many women have their own preferred arrangement of *motu* hearth, although most would agree that they like them to be large and raised off the ground. While women do not claim that one method is better than another, many say that they prefer their own because they are used to them.

Married couples attach a sense of pride to women's competence at cooking by *motu*. However, some women, who see themselves as particularly sophisticated, claim knowledge of how to make *motu*, but prefer not to do it themselves. Instead, they instruct their house-girls on how to make *motu* to their specifications. Such women value the idea of *motu* but not the actions that are needed to make it. Through this double-standard, they augment the image of their sophistication and distance from the hands-on work of home, yet still valorise its results. Although women who will not make *motu* could be seen as failing to perform the work of a good wife, by expecting others to make it on their behalf they neatly side-step censure. When middle class people say that these women are those "who wear make-up, polish their fingernails, and want to avoid getting dirty like *lokol* women", they are ambivalent about whether they ought to disparage these women or not.

Making middle class houses: house decoration and cleaning

In her description of housing change, Rensel describes Rotumans' concern to obtain "European style" housing and interior decoration as a phenomenon that has markedly increased over the last three decades. Among other factors, she links this interest to the "devaluation of collective work" and the "spread of individualism" (1997*b*: 27-28). Affluent Honiarans are similarly concerned with decor, and in particular display their cosmopolitan standing by including overtly foreign items in their houses. In addition, they describe

women's roles in house decoration as elements of their attempts to maintain successful marriages.

In order to maintain the interiors of their houses, many women spend considerable time embroidering and making crochet doilies to pin on walls and cover tables and chairs. They also make, buy and exchange shell ornaments inspired by Samoan handicrafts. Most affluent Honiarans also see Fijian *tapa*,[7] imported colourful tea towels (referred to as "*tapa*"), wall hangings ("scrolls"), and imported kitchen equipment as desirable additions to their houses (see plate 11). Although some women do have opportunities to travel overseas, generally it is men who bring back such items from abroad, or who ask their friends, relatives or work colleagues to bring goods back for them. In the most highly decorated houses, the effect is a comfortable clutter of patterns and colour, which echoes gardens full of gerberia, bougainvillaea and marigolds.

Plate 11: House interior: showing Fijian *tapa*, shell ornaments, crocheted hangings, and a tea-towel given by myself.

[7] *Tapa* is flat, beige coloured cloth made from the inner bark of Mulberry trees.

It is important to Honiarans that decorative goods from overseas are adorned with the name and image of the foreign place. Such images become Honiaran when their portrayal of faraway lands acts as testament to their owners' privilege of global connections, and hence position in the urban milieu. In addition, affluent Honiarans hold electrical equipment, such as video-players and music centres, at a premium. Kitchens in middle class houses often contain electric kettles, toasters and toasted-sandwich makers, which people seldom use for their culinary functions, but put on display as prestige items from overseas. Prestige accrues from the cost of the items, but more importantly from the fact that they were obtained on overseas trips and thereby indicate a cosmopolitan life-style: whether of the householders themselves, or of their contacts. In this way, foreign, imported goods are directly associated with affluent, powerful people. Similar observations about the inclusion of foreign items to indicate prestige have been made by Wilk in Belize. He argues that it is important to see such goods as not having uniform interpretations, as "meaning is always in dispute" (1994: 101). However, while meanings may well be in dispute, affluent Honiarans consistently use imported items to state their wealth and position, and hope that their rural relatives will note that this is the case. When rural Solomon Islanders interpret such displays to mean that their urban relatives are independent, this is precisely the message that those urbanites intend to convey.

Of course, belief in wealth and influence is relative, such that Honiarans who have the opportunity to go overseas represent themselves as sophisticated and wealthy compared to their rural relatives, but as unsophisticated, poor and *lokol* in comparison to foreigners. For example, as one of the three international destinations with direct air-links to Solomon Islands, Brisbane is a popular destination for business, educational, church or holiday trips. While in Brisbane, nearly every Solomon Islander whom I spoke to visits Crazy Clark's Discount Variety Store in the city centre, which has become a shared experience for all well-travelled Honiarans, through which they can exclude others. Prestige that people obtain from these trips is usually juxtaposed against a sense of poverty compared to foreigners. As a primary school teacher explained to me in 1997:

> We went to Crazy Clark's while we were in Brisbane, the one in the Mall. It was good to go shopping there because there were lots of things we wanted, and the prices were lower than elsewhere—so it's the kind of shop which suits us *lokol* people [laughter]. While we were there we saw plenty of other Pacific Islanders shopping for things to take home too. There weren't many Australians in that shop—they can afford to buy [more expensive] things from elsewhere.

While the kind of items that households display is a mark of a couple's wealth and success, some also claim that house decoration plays a role in maintaining men's sexual fidelity. Such a metaphoric relationship between houses and conjugal couples is one that has been noted by several writers. For instance, Bloch describes Zafimaniry practices: "as a marriage stabilizes,... so the house of the couple becomes more permanent" (1995*b*: 68).[8] While Zafimaniry stress the fabric and structure of houses, Honiarans connect interior decoration to the success and tenacity of marriage, especially because of its effect on fidelity. Such rhetoric is often explicitly Christian in tone, and probably reflects the former zeal of missionaries to inculcate European-style family structures centred on conjugal couples (see Jolly and MacIntyre 1989). Women who are active in church organisations are particularly vociferous in their explanations that it women's duty to maintain comfortable (and some say, beautiful) houses. They say that this, along with providing good, varied food and mothering, encourages their husbands to spend more time at the house, and less elsewhere. For example, during an interview about married life, a leader of a church women's group explained:

> At my house, I've got crochet, plants and shells inside it. He [my husband] loves to sit around the house and enjoy himself. He doesn't go around and drink beer, because his house is homely, it's got beauty—and he likes beauty ... so, he's happy to sit and read his books at the house. Lots of people come and say to me 'oh, your house is nice, it feels warm.' So, to make a husband stay at a house and enjoy his family and wife, the wife must make it so that he is happy to stay in—that's what makes a good, happy marriage.

In this way, women equate house decoration with maintaining a marriage, by preventing their husbands from spending too much time elsewhere, which they say can lead to infidelity. If somebody's husband is unfaithful, then many blame his wife's inability or reluctance to decorate their houses with crochet and *tapa*. House decoration represents women's ability to provide adequate comfort and support to their husbands, and they expect men's attachment to their houses to echo their sexual and emotional attachment to their wives. This emphasis on individual responsibility for maintaining houses echoes the emphasis on individual responsibility for marriage, which I discussed in the previous chapter.

Cooking and beautifying houses is the role of women, and men provide prestige items and raw materials. Such building and maintenance is opposed by their very young children, who make houses dirty. Their dirtying often goes beyond a temporary scattering of crumbs and debris: in some houses, children draw on the walls with pens and pencils; make

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[8] See also Carsten & Hugh Jones (1995: 26-27).

holes in the fabric of the building; destroy soft furnishings; and uproot plants in the gardens. Often, their parents and other carers do not overly discourage them from this, only occasionally they gently chide children for being "naughty" (*noti*) in this way. This reflects broader views on the socialisation and importance of children. People permit their very young children (usually those under 10 years old) to play and destroy at will, claiming that they do not know better. These attitudes may also indicate that the very existence of young children stabilises a household and marriage, such that their destruction is relatively harmless.[9] While only a brief example, children's destruction of the material fabric of houses, and adults' reluctance to stop them, underlines the constant dynamic between actions that construct or maintain houses and those that destroy them, but also the primacy of conjugal couples as the cores of households.

Deciding who stays on a long-term basis: house-girls

Honiarans' decoration of houses highlights their everyday constitution of middle class life-styles and relationships. Although children pose little threat to the integrity of households despite their destruction of houses, threats from others can prove more serious. Urbanites must make decisions about who may stay as members of their households, and do so in such a way as to maintain their discrete nature, while not causing offence to relatives. Decisions relating to house-girls (*haosgele*) and long-term guests highlight the ongoing tensions between men and women, as well as between urbanites and their rural relatives. Here I describe householders' employment of house-girls, which is followed by a discussion of their provision of accommodation for relatives.

Most middle class households include one or more house-girls to help the women and girls with domestic duties and childcare. Often, house-girls come straight from the provinces to stay with urban households. Employment of house-girls is something only affordable to those with reasonably high incomes, and it is important because it highlights urbanites' shift away from the usual arrangements at *hom*. While at *hom*, married women expect young girls to work hard in kitchen and garden, and in *taun* this translates into paying girls for their labour while combining values of employment with those of kinship obligations and *kastom* prohibitions. Engaging one or more house-girls displays a household's wealth and prestige, especially for the woman of a house, who can spend her

[9] This attitude may also reflect the belief that material goods are naturally replenishing. See Philbert & Jourdan (1996). They discuss Solomon Islanders' attitudes to Western consumer goods, and claim that the throwaway attitude towards these things is because people conceptualise goods as more natural than cultural. As natural things replenish themselves, then consumer goods are believed to replenish themselves too, therefore people do not feel the need to repair those which are broken

time delegating chores rather than doing them herself. In these ways, people's management of their relationships with house-girls says much about the politics of urban kinship and moral judgements.

Women generally prefer that house-girls are female relatives of their husband in order to avoid sexual liaisons between them. However, some value the companionship of one of their own sisters or cousins instead, and say that this avoids the problematic of *kastom* prohibitions between themselves and affines. Whether the house-girl belongs to their own or their husband's family (*saed*: "side"), women say that a relative will look after their children better than someone who is unrelated. They explain this by saying that family members have greater affection for a child than others. Very occasionally, families engage boys as household helpers. I knew one household living on the outskirts of Honiara who had a young man as their helper, but they saw their situation as anomalous and he became a constant source of amusement, and they joked that he was a "girl". The more proper arrangement is for females to fill these positions, as people generally see house-work as the most appropriate role for young girls before marriage.

The relationship of house-girls to household members is usually the concern of women, as it is they who control a house-girl's responsibilities on a day-to-day basis. A woman from New Georgia (Western Province)—Rebecca—explained that while many women preferred that a house-girl was from their husbands' "side" (*saed*), she would not want one of her husband's sisters or cousins as a house-girl for several reasons. First, if boys from her side came to the house to "ask [sexual] favours" (*oso oso*) of the house-girl, then because those boys would be her "in-laws" (*tambu*), the girl would find it hard to refuse them according to *kastom*. Second, if the house-girl was Rebecca's husband's sister, then the house-girl would not "feel free" (*fil fri*) to discuss household affairs with Rebecca. Third, according to Rebecca's *kastom* it was prohibited for her husband's sister or cousin to wash her own brother's or his wife's (Rebecca's) clothing. Rebecca explained that these problems would particularly apply if the house-girl was the oldest sister of her husband, but would still hold—albeit in attenuated form—for other sisters and female cousins of her husband. Rebecca explained this by saying that it was prohibited for a sister to wash any of her brother's and his wife's clothes, but that a cousin could wash outer garments as long as she did not wash underwear

In addition, older women—especially those who are separated or widowed—sometimes work as house-girls for families not necessarily related to their own. In such instances, these women undertake this kind of work purely for financial reasons, and rarely live within their employers' households. Although many women prefer to have relatives as

house-girls, some say that they prefer the anonymity of unrelated house-girls. Occasionally though, women find it difficult to employ women older than themselves as house-girls—even if they are not related to each other—as they say that it would contradict their desire to show respect for older women. Also, while such employers feel that they are being benevolent by giving such women employment, many house-girls see the situation differently, and complain about the amount of work they have to do and the low wages they receive. In particular, many focus on "sweeping" (*brumum*) as a metaphor for their discontent at always clearing up after a family that is not their own. They grumble, "we're always sweeping." Nonetheless, many older women find themselves bound to such work as their only means of obtaining an income, while some young house-girls decide to return home or find other employment. Although they may have been initially excited by the bright lights of town, they soon learn that the restrictions placed on their movement have some foundation in truth. They become wary of town's allure, which can be threatening to their supposed sexual innocence, as they encounter the issues that I discussed in the previous chapter (cf. Jourdan 1985: 74 note 15).

While women are adamant that unrelated house-girls not living with them *are* employees, they are less sure how to classify related live-in house-girls. Some householders give their house-girls board, lodging and a few dollars occasionally. Others are more generous, paying house-girls as much as SI$50 per week from their own income of SI$400, and giving them weekends off. Money for house-girls' wages is not necessarily the sole responsibility of male householders. One woman explained that she and her husband alternated paying their house-girl each week, as both of them had paid employment. She particularly disdained those who treated their house-girls "like slaves". However, house-girls themselves and even generous householders, do not see house-girl arrangements as simple exchanges of cash for labour. Money is part of the transaction, but they also concern themselves with how much to implement *kastom* prohibitions. While Rebecca was clear that she wanted to maintain such prohibitions, others preferred to uphold them at *hom*, but interpret them more loosely in *taun*. For instance, some expect house-girls to launder their affines' clothes. House-girls who have recently arrived from *hom* tend to find such expectations problematic at first, but say that they soon get used to it, especially because in town they are not close to the judgmental eyes of older relatives. In this way, kinship practices operate alongside those of a labour market, and reflect wider definitions of employment that encompass values and norms of interpersonal and kinship relations (see also Chapter 6 on work practices).

An element of kinship that is especially pertinent in relationships between house-girls and householders is the general obligations to care and protect younger female relatives. Householders say that must ensure that younger relatives are controlled: especially in their movements around town, and who they associate with. Therefore, they feed, clothe and keep a close eye on the behaviour of house-girls, to make sure that the call of Honiara's night-spots and urban youth do not lead them astray.

Deciding who stays on a long-term basis: guests

While house-girls are sources of prestige and problems, householders' attempts to deal with long-term guests highlight their concern to fulfil kinship obligations and avoid offence, yet restrict household expenditure and maintain the integrity of nuclear families. Unmarried siblings, nieces, nephews or cousins sometimes stay with their urban relatives on a long-term basis, perhaps for several years at a time. Some are those who have jobs, but whose employers do not provide them with accommodation; others are in town to attend school or college. Such guests are often reasonably welcome if there is sleeping space for them, or room for an extension to be built, and they help buy food and pay bills. However, tensions often arise as a result of these visitors. Wage-earners staying with urban relatives sometimes feel that they contribute much more than their fair share, and want to send more money home and spend more on themselves. Host families often express exasperation that their space and time is being encroached upon, and say that their relatives should contribute more money or food to the household; send less money home; and spend less on themselves. In this way, while host families are happy to keep their own incomes for themselves, they claim that money earned by any long-term guests should also accrue to their own households, as they privilege the desires of urban households above the requests of rural relatives.

While wage-earners staying with relatives in town present particular problems concerning space and money, urbanites find it more difficult to refuse requests for children to stay with them, even if their own space and money is already stretched to breaking point. People at home often ask their urban relatives to take one or more child into their household, so that they may receive a better education than they might at home. Honiarans find it hard to refuse such requests, because they say that they feel a sense of obligation to care for relatives' children as if they were their own. In particular, householders (both men and women) find it hardest to refuse requests to provide long term housing for their younger siblings, or requests to care for their young nephews and nieces. Refusal of requests can be a source of intense friction between urban and rural kin, as rural relatives at home claim that urbanites are flouting norms of hospitality, which they describe as an element of *kastom*.

Guests come and go from home, and often move between houses in town, sometimes because of conflict with their host households. Tensions may relate to concern about moral probity, as householders feel obliged to safeguard their young female visitors by monitoring their movements to protect their supposed innocence. For example, an unmarried girl was staying with a family in a large house in Kola'a. She worked in a shop and sent most of her wages home to pay for her sister's school fees. While she was staying at her aunt's house in town, her aunt began to suspect that the girl had a boyfriend, especially when she started to return to the house late in the evenings. Tensions increased until the aunt and her husband became so angry and suspicious of the girl's behaviour that she was left with no option but to leave the house. The aunt said that the girl was not behaving as she should, and would not listen to her warnings. Therefore she would no longer like to feel responsible for the girl, who should go and stay with other relatives. The aunt was particularly concerned that the girl's parents would blame her if anything untoward happened to the girl, even though she clearly stated that she had tried to maintain a firm hand. Eventually, the girl packed up her few belongings and moved to a smaller house belonging to other relatives at the far side of town. Of course, had she successfully hidden her relationship from her hosts, this drama would not have taken place.

It is often this kind of stress that causes people to move between houses in town, but tensions may also centre on financial strain. While guests often bring gifts of food from home to households, and see this as fair exchange for their accommodation (see Burt 1994: 38), many urbanites say that such gifts do not fully recompense them for the expense of the rice and tinned fish that visitors consume. This financial stress for hosts can translate into emotional stress, which leads many to try to rid themselves of their guests. To do so, most adopt non-verbal strategies: they maintain "quietness". If they were to openly discuss their financial concerns, then this could be read as an indication of the absence of reciprocal ties with their kin in a manner that would be too strong and offensive. People see non-verbal strategies as less confrontational and therefore morally preferable.

Popular strategies include no longer buying food other than rice, and staying away from the house as much as possible (avoidance). Usually, the guests take the hint and move on. In these ways, householders do have some control over who stays in their house, which enables them to prevent their households becoming overwhelmed.

One—exceptional—woman chose to speak out against her husband's relatives, who yet again had come to stay for several weeks. She told them directly that they were a burden on her and her household, and were taking food out of her children's mouths. Her affines left, but after this event, her husband's urban kin constantly criticised her behind her back. They

said that she was not a "quiet woman" as she ought to be, instead she was a "woman who talked to much" (*woman save toktok tumas*), and that she should not have "scolded" (*tok had*) her affines. She had shown herself unable to behave with appropriate respect, and was flouting norms of sociability which allow for the smooth functioning of urban life. While the woman's affines agreed that her guests were burdensome, the affront that they claimed she had caused was above and beyond that which was acceptable.

To maintain households, urbanites try to rid themselves of those who place unacceptable stress on household integrity. Integrity may be defined by morality (as in the case of the young girl), or economics (as in the case of non-contributing guests). In these ways, while much of the fluidity in household composition results from the demands of relatives, householders are constantly balancing these demands with their own desire to sustain their households, which are based on couples and their nuclear families.

Movement and spatial organisation: kin, affines and *kastom*

All of my informants claimed that they knew of ethically specific *kastom* regarding use of house space, based on gender, kin and affinal relationships. To different degrees, people follow *kastom* guidelines about who is permitted to enter the marital bedroom; who may position themselves higher than others; who can sit close to whom; and about who may see whom entering the toilet room. Importantly, these are not relics of some unchanging past, but are those which have evolved around housing design that has changed over the last century.

While people usually design and build their own houses when living at home, and some may do so in town, I have explained how many middle class urbanites live in houses that were neither designed nor built by them. Many houses in Honiara have layouts that are problematic to those who wish to adhere to *kastom.* For example, houses often have living space underneath the main raised floor, and have inside toilets leading off from a living room or other communal area. This is not to say that alterations would be impossible to make, but the fact that many choose not to do so indicates their efforts to be middle class in town, and to manage any tensions and disquiet that such houses may provoke.

As discussed previously, visitors from home can cause strain because of financial and moral pressures. In addition, they cause problems regarding use of house space. This is often because many urbanites believe that those at home follow *kastom* more than they do. Therefore, when visitors come from home, some urbanites feel that they ought to follow *kastom* prohibitions about movement (and visibility of those movements) that they would not usually adhere to in town.

Florence was married to a man from a different ethnic group to herself. They lived in town in a large, newly built house, which their employers had provided for them, without any design input from the couple. Florence complained that her brother-in-law was visiting, and because of the internal layout of the house, she could see him entering the toilet-room if she was in the kitchen or living room. This caused her much stress, which she attributed to her *kastom,* which prohibited her from seeing her opposite-sex affine entering or going to a toilet place. She found herself spending an increasing amount of time outside the house, and she felt unable to enter the toilet herself when her brother-in-law was in her house. She said that it was not against *kastom* for her husband's ethnic group "these days". However, she explained that it *was* at her home, and she particularly wanted to follow her *kastom* as her brother-in-law was not an urbanite. The discomfort she felt was not resolved until her brother-in-law went home. Florence did not discuss her discomfort with her brother-in-law, and when she raised the problem with her husband, he surmised that his brother did not see the issue as a problem, and would not discuss it with him because he was only staying in town for a short time.

In another household, a couple went to the lengths of building an outside toilet to solve such problems. They took steps to alleviate tensions about use of space, which indicates that the potential exists to make physical changes if desired. In Florence's household however, no changes were made: her husband preferred to live in this middle class style of house rather than altering it. By not altering the house, ultimately he chose to alter their rules about use of space. Florence was caught in the middle of this process of self-imposed change, unable to live at ease with her affines staying in the house as it stood, but unable to arrange structural changes to it because of her husband's attitude.

When no short-term guests are staying with an urban household, parents and young children usually sleep in one bedroom; older girls and any female relatives in another; and boys and men in a third bedroom. If there is no third bedroom, men and boys sleep in the lounge or on the veranda. Both veranda and lounge are communal living areas, which are used for eating, chatting, resting and watching videos such as *Street Fighter*, which was a perennial favourite in the Solomon Islands a the time of my fieldwork.[10] While householders usually keep televisions for viewing videos inside the living room, often, young boys sit on the veranda to watch through open windows. If a house does not have an external veranda, it

[10] At the time of my fieldwork, there was no national television network in the Solomon Islands. However, in June and July 1998, the Solomon Telekom company relayed Australian programmes to houses with aerials during their coverage of the World Cup soccer tournament. The content of videos is important, but I do not discuss it in any detail here. See White's discussion of the role of Rambo movies on Isabel (1991*b*), and Jourdan's discussion of the appeal of Rambo movies in Honiara as generic culture, which draws on images of "traditional" heroism in Solomon Islands (1995: 142-145).

is common for householders to refer to their living room as the "veranda". Indoors kitchens are usually women's domains, but this does not prevent men from going in, making their own drinks, taking food or commenting on cooking processes. Members of most ethnic groups—most strictly Malaitans—do not allow relatives (other than the couple's children) or friends into a conjugal couple's bedroom (see Jourdan 1985: 77). Only house-girls might rush in and out to comfort a crying child or to collect laundry. In this way, a couple's bedroom is the most private area inside a house, and echoes their partial withdrawal from kin networks at home.

Previously, I discussed how decisions about who may stay in houses are guided by the desire to maintain moral probity, and to restrict expenditure. In addition, such decisions may be justified by reference to *kastom*. For example, Choiseulese people say that according to their *kastom*, a woman or girl may not stay in the same house as her married brother (see Scheffler 1965: 78). In reality though, these norms are broken when expedient, and urbanites explain such breaches by referring to the obvious lack of alternative housing space in Honiara. While they explain that they feel little compunction to adhere to *kastom* in town, some urbanites, who have experienced life at home, explain that urban rejection of *kastom* may make them feel uncomfortable. This is another example of the process whereby *kastom* is becoming less compelling as a practice, but nonetheless has an emotional impact on certain urbanites. In this way, *kastom* is very much a contested field, and interpretations of it are largely a matter of increasing individual choice for urbanites, a point also made by Gewertz and Errington (1996: 490).

When kin, affines or friends do stay with one another, they use house space in ways that reflect their ethnic backgrounds and gender. In general, women sit in the kitchen or inside living room if there are no men present, and men occupy the veranda or living room. However, often both men and women do use the same room, and arrange themselves carefully within it to avoid flaunting conventions of gender segregation, which they say are governed by *kastom*. Every ethnic group practices rules of comportment, which relate to modesty and gender.[11] In particular, most Malaitans follow prohibitions about proximity of unmarried men and women, as closeness implies desire for sexual relations. Furthermore, many prevent men from passing over women in public, as this mimics sexual intimacy. For instance, men should not step over women's outstretched legs (Burt 1994: 35; Ross 1973: 132). Members of other ethnic groups say that these proscriptions are solely Malaitan, but

[11] For example, see Firth's discussion of Tikopian modesty (1963: 267-268); Burt's discussion of those of Kwara'ae speakers on Malaita (1994: 35); Ivens's of Sa'a South Malaita (1972: 90); Ross's description of Baegu, Malaita (1973: 132); and Scheffler's discussion of Choiseul (1965: 78).

many adhere to similar restrictions, which are associated with the display of respect, especially between certain grades of affines (see below). In addition, because many Honiarans perceive Malaitan prohibitions as more strict then their own, if they want to show respect (and therefore to be respected), then they may adhere to Malaitan *kastom* regarding comportment in public places. As one (non-Malaitan) woman explained: "it's good to tuck in your skirt when passing close to food or men at the market, Malaitans like it because it shows that you know and respect their *kastom*."

In general, it is important that people move correctly if they wish to avoid offence and to maintain a good reputation. People talk about women who do not comport themselves properly as "people who don't sit properly" (*olketa no save hao fo sidaun gud*). Certain ethnic groups are quietly singled out for their impropriety in this respect. In particular, members of other ethnic groups said that girls from one outlying province did not know how to "sit properly", and often revealed their thighs to men. They equated this with what they described as the loose sexual morality of members of that particular ethnic group. As one woman humorously explained her attempts to sit down carefully: "I'd better not be like a market, putting everything on display, like those girls" (*nogud mi maket, nogud mi soim evriting olsem olgeta gele*). Therefore, people interpret sitting and moving correctly as indicative of moral probity.

Uses of house space in the privacy of a mixed-ethnicity household show some of the complex intersections of ethnicity, gender and interpretation of affinal prohibitions. The household with whom I initially stayed was based on a Choiseulese man married to a Malaitan—Kwara'ae speaking—woman. How the family and visitors arranged themselves clearly related to their interpretations of *kastom* regulations, complicated by gender. The tolerance they exhibited of different *kastom* shows more widespread acceptance of ethnic pluralism among the Honiaran middle class.

For example, I found that when women and children were watching videos at the house, if men arrived, then women would offer them the central chairs and move to the side onto other chairs or floor cushions. In addition, women from Kwara'ae explained that it was improper to lie down when any men were present, as it was disrespectful and not in accordance with *kastom*. Choiseulese women said that they followed similar prohibitions, but only with regard to their brothers and male cousins.

However, Choiseulese women said that it was disrespectful for them to walk in front of any man when they were seated, and went go to great lengths to avoid doing so. Often, these women stayed in chairs outside the main living area and watched videos from there rather than join a group with men in it, whether those men were from Choiseul or Kwara'ae.

If, for any reason, a Choiseulese woman needed to walk in front of a man, she would apologise and bend over to do so. This use of space is related to two distinct prohibitions: that of proximity between opposite sex affines, and that of deferment to men by bending over in front of them, or by avoiding walking in front of them altogether. The latter is largely related to respect: such that married women did not conduct themselves in this way in front of unmarried young men, and young male children might defer to a prestigious female guest by avoiding walking in front of her or bending over. Kwara'ae women also tended to do this, but less markedly or fastidiously so. People rarely articulated these everyday conventions of physical practice, unless to describe how someone broke the rules, as they belonged to the realm of embodied knowledge. However, when I found myself bending over and apologising to walk in front of men, women noticed what I was doing, and laughed that I had become a Solomon Islander too (see Chapter 1, where I explain that this was primarily humorous). In this way, modes of comportment were not purely tacit.

If Kwara'ae women were on their own watching videos, then they would always sit upright and adjust their skirts if men arrived. If the visitors were the women's consanguinal relatives—the women's *saed* ("side")—then they would come and sit in the same room as the women. If however, Choiseulese men or boys from the husband's side arrived, the men would usually go to on the veranda, and watch videos through an open window. Although the Kwara'ae women usually encouraged them to come inside, saying that they were about to move away, the visitors normally demurred politely. In such cases, the men acted in this way for two reasons. First, these women were their opposite-sex affines, thus *kastom* dictated that it was improper for them to be in close proximity to one another. Second, they cited linguistic differences as significant: because the women were chatting in *langguis*, they felt unable to join them for fear of feeling excluded and in case the conversation was concerned with family matters that they should not be present for, even if they could not understand. If, on the other hand, Choiseulese women were watching videos on their own and Choiseulese males—other than their spouses—arrived, then the women would almost always move away to the kitchen or elsewhere.

Often it transpired that Kwara'ae women came to join Choiseulese women to watch videos in the living room. Then they would all sit together, but not in close contact with one another, and *sometimes* the Choiseulese women would retire to the kitchen. This reflected their respect of and deferment to the Kwara'ae wife as female head of the household. If however, Choiseulese men arrived while a mixed group of women were watching videos, and those women did not move away, Choiseulese men would sit on the veranda, or sometimes in the kitchen. Unlike Choiseulese men, if men from Kwara'ae arrived then they

also might sit on the veranda, but more often felt comfortable and willing to sit with women inside, as long as those women moved to the side and offered chairs. While Kwara'ae men did not object to the presence of Choiseulese affines, the Choiseulese women might move away out of deferment to their Kwara'ae affines. Although Kwara'ae adhere to prohibitions about opposite sex space and proximity, they say that they are more free to mix with affines than other groups such as Choiseulese. An afternoon at the house would frequently consist of a mixed group of Kwara'ae relatives watching videos; although sometimes, the women left the men there while they went away to prepare food or attend to children.

In these ways, Honiarans implicate ethnicity in movements and seating arrangements within households. However, although they tend to single out members of one particular ethnic group as acting with particular disrespect and impropriety, and members of many ethnic groups restrict their movements in public according to Malaitan norms, generally people accept and do not disparage ethnic differences. However, on occasion—especially in the context of a mixed ethnicity household— people do *not* accept difference if they feel that affines ought to have made some degree of effort to adapt to their own ways. For instance, some would not criticise Malaitan women who sat close to or walked in front of their own male relatives, saying that it was all right because it was *kastom blo olketa* ("their custom"). However, if a Malaitan woman walked in front of a man from an ethnic group who frowned on this behaviour, then that man's female relatives were more concerned, saying that they wished the woman would learn the norms of movement which they adhere to. This said, any slight criticism was made out of earshot, and was softened by their reaffirmation of their awareness of ethnic differences. In this way then, ethnicity is important in discussions of comportment, but is a concern that is generally kept to the confines of private discussions. A pragmatic awareness and certain acceptance of ethnic difference in more public arenas operates alongside a desire for one another's adaptation within households.

Reactions to norms of comportment echo sentiments about relationships. Those who are happy and secure in their relationships are often more willing to make adaptations to please a partner's kin, than those who are less secure and stable. A non-Tikopian girl, who was in a stormy relationship, complained that she disliked visiting her Tikopian boyfriend's relatives, because she was expected to kneel, even to move around, when they were present (see Firth 1963: 81). She claimed that it was uncomfortable and hurt her knees, as she was not "used to it". Those in more secure relationships tend to be willing to make adaptations. In Chapter 2, I described a successful marriage between a Tikopian woman and a Malaitan man. Her Malaitan husband said that he always knelt when in any of her relatives' houses, and when her relatives visited their house, all the members of their household changed their

postures and movements accordingly. This older couple described the Tikopian *kastom* of kneeling and not turning one's back—particularly on affines—as a means of showing respect (Firth 1963: 267). They said that the discomfort was minimal and acceptable given the importance of respect. This is an important point, which shows that adaptation and acceptance of the *kastom* of other ethnic groups is inseparable from personal circumstances and the quality of relationships.

Circumscribing movements between houses: the power of domestic violence and creeping

Movements between households also exemplify the dynamic between ethnicity, gender relations and personal circumstances. Women fear being seen outside the house after night-fall, because they fear attack by strangers, general malicious gossip about their probity, and domestic violence from their husbands. In the previous chapter, I described the sense of moral decay that is associated with urban life. While urbanites claim that this is a feature of rural areas too, their rural kin say that it is an urban phenomenon. However, when discussing the possibility of attack, urbanites do say that they are more at risk in town than at home.

Employed women tend to have more freedom of movement than housewives. Even so, working married women reported that their husbands arranged to meet them after work, and to take and collect them from visits to friends. These women said that their husbands did not trust them because of the anonymity of the urban setting, but the women accepted this as reasonably understandable. Knauft (1997) suggests that men in present-day Melanesia have increased insecurity due to their unavoidable involvement in the cash economy. This increases "sexual antagonism" and means that men are at pains to control women's sexuality by restricting women's movements and their involvement in the cash economy. In addition, urbanites express concern that without such control, moral decay will occur, leading to the breakdown of households[12] and the eradication of any attempts to establish permanence of town life.

Women's fear of being outside the house at nightfall partly rests on a fear of abuse by male strangers, and women and girls say that those who roam outside their houses after dark become legitimate targets. In addition, many Honiarans claim to feel unsafe inside their own houses. A phenomenon known as *krip* ("to creep") is a common topic of chat.[13] When a man creeps, it means that he comes to a house at night and hangs around outside, trying to

[12] Comaroff and Comaroff have pointed out the ubiquity of the view that women have the ability to "destroy home, husband and family" (1993: xviii).
[13] See Scheffler (1965: 78) for mention of creeping as "a favourite night-time sport for young men" on Choiseul.

attract women's attention, asking for sex, and possibly threatening rape. Women and girls say that unwanted sexual liaisons are one of their biggest fears. Usually, people say that men and boys are creepers, but on occasion one hears of women creeping because of obsession with certain men. This said, when women—rather than men—creep, people are more likely to say that they were in some way insane or affected by magic. In town, creepers are rarely identified as individuals, but are associated with groups of people, and creeping is said to be more widespread among some ethnic groups than others.

Incidents of house-breaking in Honiara are on the rise,[14] often for theft, but also for creeping: one couple found a man in their bedroom in the middle of the night, another group of women were prodded with sticks through an open window while they slept. Both urbanites and village dwellers fear creepers: the former use it as a rationale for why they do not want to return home, and the latter use it as reason for why they do not want to move to town. However, all agree that greater potential exists for creeping in town. These fears are largely grounded in unwillingness to be a stranger in an unknown place. Women living in villages fear the town's size and multi-ethnic milieu, where people unknown to them might come and creep at their houses. For example, one woman explained how when she was a girl she had left school in one area because she was tired of the creeping there, and returned home to her natal area where she felt safe. She represented the school's area as a place where creeping was particularly rife, which worried every girl, but especially those who were from elsewhere. She explained: "the way of the boys there was no good." While at home, although creeping does take place, people generally know who the creepers are, and see it as less threatening. In town, they claim not to know who the creepers are: they are strangers. In this way, people say that town and places away from their own homes are especially dangerous, although most agree that town is particularly risky because of its size. This means that there is greater potential for strangers to pass by, as well as making it difficult for relatives to watch over one another.

Women also say that they do not travel alone or at night because others would perceive them as immoral. It is significant that women not only fear the opinions of men, but also of other women. In this way, control over women's sexual propriety is exerted by both sexes. Women feel frightened to act in ways that jeopardise their own propriety; *and* feel threatened by the possibility of sexual license of other women (for example, house-girls, as discussed above). Very few married women resist pressure to stay at the house, and only leave their houses in daylight and with company. They know that the price for not doing so

[14] See Keesing (1994) on how "traditional" notions of bravery among young Kwaio men are translated into house-breaking and theft in town.

may be malicious gossip, and more seriously, the wrath of their husbands, which may be expressed violently.[15]

As well as fear of attack and general malicious gossip about their probity, women also curtail their movements because they fear violent retribution from their husbands, which rests on the belief that women who travel at night are making themselves sexually available. For example, late one night, I overheard a man beating his wife on the road by our house, he shouted: "you just go out again, go back to the night-club and dance with those men, you prostitute." Violence against women often occurs alongside violence against property. Men not only destroy the physical well-being of their wives, but also of household goods and the fabric of houses themselves. Many men (but not all) see wife-beating and house-wrecking as legitimate retribution for the destructive effect of her (often imaginary) infidelity on the status of husbands, and the stability of households. In addition, just as women say that the state of houses' decoration echoes and affects the state of marriages, wife-beaters destroy their houses at the same time as (or sometimes instead of) beating their wives. However, destruction of the house does not always replace violence against spouses in the manner described by Nash among Nagovisi in Bougainville (1992), instead, the two often complement one another.

When domestic violence occurs, women often run away to stay with their mothers or sisters. Usually though, they return to their houses after finding that their mothers and sisters tell them that it was their fault they were beaten, because they must have done something to provoke their husbands. For instance, they were outside the house at night, or had spoken to their husbands too harshly, perhaps as a result of their husbands being out late (not being a "quiet woman"). Also, as Counts (1992: 68) has also pointed out among Kaliai in Papua New Guinea, not only is wife-beating seen as the norm, but relatives may be unwilling to harbour runaway women as they may not want to return brideprice payments, are frightened of retribution from the husband, and worry that the runaway will lose custody of her children. In these ways, dominant discourses about gender roles are adopted and reinforced by men and women (see Moore 1994: 150). Voices of dissent are marginalised in the way described by Zimmer-Tamakoshi in Papua New Guinea (1993*a;* 1993*b*), where educated, urban women who participate in Western activities, and who choose not to marry until they are older, are seen as having a freer mode of sexuality than rural women, and are denigrated as immoral (see also Chapter 7). The activities which women perform in the hope of achieving prestige and status are used by others to undermine their power. Thus, if a woman is out

[15] Toren (1994: 30) describes how Fijian women abhor male violence against them, but simultaneously expect men to be violent. This resonates with my material from Honiara.

visiting at night, or crosses town to go visiting without any of her children, then she is deemed to be acting too freely, and is seen as an appropriate target for her husband's violence.

Occasionally, women say that they can invoke *kastom* means of preventing or stopping domestic violence. One woman explained that restrictions on interactions between opposite-sex siblings among her ethnic group meant that if a sister "stood up" in front of her brother while her was beating his wife, she brought such shame on him that he would stop his beating. Again though, the milieu of town makes this difficult, as relatives do not necessarily live close enough to intervene. In this way, while people try to construct and maintain independent households in the urban setting, they also assert that the sheer anonymity of town and the independence of households can prove detrimental to households, houses, and the marriages at their core. There is a constant dynamic between attempts to build and forces that destroy.

Conclusions

This largely ethnographic chapter has explored how affluent Honiarans construct and maintain their nuclear families and discrete households. Their use of house space and management of relationships with kin and affines reflects and reinforces their manipulations of ethnicity and *kastom* in their attempts to distance themselves from kin and affines at home. Couples and their domestic settings are central to the production of cosmopolitan life-styles, which increasingly afford primacy to relationships based on similarities in circumstances of employment and affluence, rather than those based on commonality of kinship and ethnicity. Such cosmopolitanism is expressed and reinforced by their choice of imported and lavish house-decorations, which was connected to the success of marriages and hence of households.

However, the distance that urbanites achieve from the demands of home, and the independence of their household units is constantly in play with their sense of connection to home. This explains urbanites' ongoing valorisation of *motu* cooking, as well as the difficulties they face when dealing with long-term guests. Furthermore, they negotiate constructions of *kastom* in their employment of house-girls and management of norms of comportment. Such negotiations are never simple, but often reflect whether people see their relationships as successful in other ways.

The integrity and independence of households is a double edged sword, as the "freedom" of urban life is constantly nuanced by Honiarans' need to keep disaffection about the demands of rural kin "quiet". In addition, fear of the perceived sexual chaos of the urban

milieu presents significant constraints on members of households, especially women. If they reject such constraints, then they may be subject to violent attack. In the subsequent chapters of this section, I describe how affluent urbanites make links between their households and form strong, supportive networks in town, which consolidate their class identity.

Chapter 4

Households on the move: formal visits and trips "home"

In Chapter 3, I examined how households exist at the intersection of *kastom*, ethnicity and negotiations between kin and affines. Here, I address the visits that those urban households make to one another for formal occasions, and their visits home. By looking at the discourses and practices of formal visiting, I suggest that they are key to affluent Honiarans creation of novel, urban forms of sociability. Formal visits serve to distance urbanites from their rural kin, to maintain the integrity of their discrete households, as well as to achieve a sense of enduring connection between households in town. Urbanites' visiting movements illustrate my claim that a focus on urban villages or settlements is inappropriate as a means of understanding middle class culture in town (see Introduction), as they do not necessarily know their neighbours, but travel across town to socialise. Honiarans also make infrequent trips home as whole households: experiences that colour both their views of life at home, and help them to reassert their difference from rural households. In these ways, Honiara's "urban swirl" consists not only of urbanites who "come and go" from town (Hannerz 1992: 216), but also of those urbanites who come and go to other households in town.

Formal visits are actions based on the mobility of entire households, as they lock up their houses and travel to others, often those at the other side of town. Households mobilise themselves en-mass to celebrate life-cycle events such as children's birthdays. They also arrange and attend less commonplace occasions at one another's houses, for example, fund-raising events. While the internal, private dynamics of marriages and households often concentrate on negotiating ethnic differences, formal visits are more public spheres wherein ethnicity is pushed into the background.

In her description of Yemeni visiting practices, Meneley explains that men and women are able to augment their household's status through their sociable actions (1996: 4-5). Although Honiarans' visits are not marked by the strict etiquette described by Meneley, their involvement in formal visits serves to bind affluent households to one another in reciprocal ties, which are based on friendships and the commonality of their affluent life-styles. Therefore, households' visits augment urbanites' status: not solely with regard to one another, but primarily vis-à-vis their less affluent relatives, who are usually excluded from such events.

Birthday parties have dual impact: they reassert the content of urban life-styles, and exclude those who are not affluent from involvement. The former element is achieved through parties' establishment and maintenance of connections between affluent urban

households, and their role in socialising children into urban, middle class life-styles. Participants achieve these through their adoption of foreign social forms which include their choice of food, and giving of gifts. The latter effect is largely achieved by the party hosts' careful inclusion of affluent urbanites, and exclusion of those who live *lokol* life-styles.

Fund-raising events at houses are less commonplace, the example I describe here is of a *wantok klab* ("wantok club"), thorough which a group of relatives in town aim to raise money for those at home. Like birthday parties, the fund-raising event serves to distance urbanites from rural relatives, but does so through the subtle redefinition of obligations to home, such that requests by home-dwellers for money from their rural relatives are fielded to a centrally controlled fund rather than to individual urbanites.

I conclude this section with a discussion of Honiarans' descriptions of their visits home. These serve similar ends to households' visits to one another in town, but also show how urbanites' detachment from home is always tempered by their desire to remain connected, such that their ties of kinship entail both "connection" and "disconnection" (see Strathern 1987: 275).

Appropriate sociability

Honiarans say that in order to create and maintain connections with other affluent households in town, they follow *moden*, Western forms of sociability, such that birthday parties entail cakes, singing and gifts. However, they add that such forms are always underpinned by *kastom* norms. As Wilk (1995: 118) suggests, global hegemony is often of form, not content. As such, appropriate sociability in Honiara consists of values and practices represented as *moden:* certain foodstuffs, birthday gifts and establishing independence from kin. These are seen as underpinned by those represented as *kastom*: reciprocation, obligation, conversation, quietness and eating together.

Although urbanites have established norms of behaviour for these occasions, which are standardised, they are still self-consciousness about them. They cast them in opposition to events at *hom*, which they denigrate as *lokol*. Formal visiting self-consciously emulates those practices associated with foreign ways of life. In this way, there is an aspiration to that which village dwellers see as otherness, and town dwellers see as desirable, *moden* and associated with themselves.

Reciprocation of invitations to formal visits is especially important, as it is one of the ways that people express and maintain their connections with other same-class households. However, although they say that kin *ought* to make return visits, more affluent or prestigious urbanites say that they actually do not feel compelled to visit their less affluent relatives.

Many have never visited their poorer relatives' houses on the outskirts of town, but rely on others' descriptions (such as those provided by me) to reassure them that their own abodes and life-styles are indeed comparatively luxurious. Affluent Honiarans expect their less wealthy urban relatives to visit them and make use of their facilities and hospitality, and resist relatives' complaints that they never visit. However, although affluent Honiarans expect relatives to visit, this does not mean that they always make such relatives feel welcome. Previously, I discussed how Honiarans attempt to control the sizes of their households by resisting relatives' requests for long-term accommodation. They also manipulate their relationships with relatives by either not inviting them to events, or by asserting their cosmopolitan status and sophistication by making some visitors feel unsophisticated and *lokol*.

Honiarans also augment their social distance from rural and less affluent relatives by their conscious appropriation of Western modes of sociability alongside those of *kastom*. These modes are of a modernity to which middle class people aspire having seen them in the media, or being practiced by their expatriate neighbours, for example, barbecue cooking. In addition, churches produce images of appropriate sociability. In the same way that missionaries expounded changes in house construction to promote nuclear family dwellings and privacy, many church leaders inculcate notions of sociability by encouraging their followers to celebrate life-cycle occasions by holding celebrations such as birthday parties within households. This is rather different to the situation in Mexico described by Napolitano (1997: 280, 293), where clergy discourage birthday celebrations for individuals, and denounce them for making families into competitive units. Clergy in the Solomon Islands appear to take the view that such parties serve to strengthen family units and the community, rather than focusing on their potentially divisive nature. Also, as churches attempt to hold regular fund-raising events for themselves (see Chapter 6), they promote fund-raising as the norm, such that Honiarans adopt their forms at their households, but then use to redefine obligations towards their kin.

While concern to hold formal visiting events in town is based on a desire to follow *moden* and foreign forms, these are underpinned by those deemed to be *kastom*, and the events become a potent mix of the two. For example, when dealing with "foreign" food, people employ *kastom* prohibitions and proscriptions to organise their dealings with it. Furthermore, detachment from home is by no means total. Urbanites' discussions of their visits home indicate how they balance their continuing attachment with home with their status as affluent urbanites. In effect, it is the practices associated with high levels of mobility—such as visiting—that show the articulation between ideas of the constitution of

discrete ethnic identities tied to notions of *hom*, and those which are urban and diasporic. The ability to deal with these tensions, to smoothly meld them, to downplay ethnic difference, and to act as discrete households, serve as marks of success in a middle class urban milieu.

The problem of neighbours

Middle class Honiarans' rather extreme mobility in town for visiting is connected to their reluctance to become friends with their neighbours. They usually only know their neighbours well if their household members are related, from the same ethnic group, or have been living side-by-side for many years and have slowly got to know one another as friends, perhaps through their children playing together. However, even if children from neighbouring households play together regularly, this does not necessarily mean that their parents meet socially. Honiarans do not tend to establish connections with neighbours quickly, due to their distrust of strangers. In a similar manner to that described by Strathern (1975: 257-257), some Honiarans claim that they are unwilling to get to know their neighbours because of ethnic differences. One woman described how she did not want to get to know her neighbours as their ethnicity made them liable to fight and quarrel a lot. In addition, middle class people claim that social distance from their neighbours discourages them from becoming friends, because of a difference in levels of sophistication. For instance, another woman explained how she did not get along with her neighbours because they were *lokol* and therefore did not understand her *moden* ways. She claimed that they maliciously gossiped about elements of her life-style, such as her predilection for wearing trousers rather than the skirts that they deemed appropriate for any morally upstanding woman, but that she deemed to be *lokol* (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed description of this incident).

In addition to ethnic and social distance, wider economic forces prevent close ties developing between neighbours. As most housing is tied to employment, many middle class people find themselves compelled to move house every few years whenever their job changes. Even if a person works in the same job for many years, some employers may still ask him or her to move house in the interim. Many people resent this transience, and claim that they try to resist it as far as possible. Women say that they encourage their husbands to stay in the same job, and try to convince their employers to allow them to stay in their house for as long as possible. Importantly, they say that the constant possibility of moving makes them reluctant to put extra effort into getting to know the strangers who live next door.

Physical mobility for visiting echoes larger movements in the lives of middle classes: they have moved around the Solomon Islands for their schooling, and later for work

and housing. They are compelled to keep moving in order to establish and maintain ties of kinship and friendship: as Strathern points out, "They [Melanesians] make their places travel" (1991: 117). Also, their very mobility serves to expose people to members of other ethnic groups, with whom they establish common ideals and life-styles that appear to subsume ethnic differences.

Food, foreignness and sociability: children's birthday parties

Birthday parties serve dual roles: they affirm connections between households, and help urbanites to socialise their children into middle class roles and life-styles as distinct from those of the village. Parents try to organise their children's birthday parties (*pati*) every year once the child has reached one year of age. People seldom celebrate the birth itself, justifying this by saying that the child is still young and it is inappropriate to celebrate until the child has lived for a full year and grown healthy. Members of some ethnic groups explain this by reference to *kastom*, saying that celebration or even announcement of a birth brings bad luck: that, "if you're too happy when new babies come, then they might leave you [die]."[1] Members of other ethnic groups do celebrate, but in a low-key manner: women visit new mothers with small gifts of baby clothes or nappies and discuss the child's looks and strength.

A child's first birthday is usually the time when parents organise the most lavish event. A successful party should be remembered by the guests as extravagant for years afterwards. For subsequent birthdays, celebrations are the norm, but by a child's mid-teens, birthday parties start to wane, as the child becomes more an adult than child, and parents expect them to assist in running younger siblings' parties, rather than to hope for their own.

Birthday parties generally follow similar formats, they include birthday cakes, speeches, gifts for the children and food. Parents of a child invite relatives and friends to parties, who arrive wearing their best clothes and bearing wrapped gifts for the child. Birthday cakes, a "happy birthday" song in English, a meal, grace and speeches are crucial elements of such events. Parents unable to fulfil these norms say that they feel "ashamed" (*sem*). Children's birthday parties are so common among the middle class that, on occasion, people must decline invitations purely because the parties of their own children coincide with those of another household. Nearly every Friday and Saturday morning, Honiara's markets and stores are busy with affluent urbanites buying the requisite food, cooking fuel

[1] Interestingly, some Honiarans pointed out that this belief was more widely held in the Solomon Islands in the past than it is today, and that now only some ethnic groups adhere to it. The reasons for this are unclear, but may be linked to the decline in infant mortality in recent years.

and gifts for parties, from where struggle back to their houses with laden shopping bags (see plate 12 and plate 13).

Plate 12: Shopping at Rove market, Honiara.

Usually, parents divide the costs of a child's party between them, although this is by no means rigid. On one occasion, a woman who did not have paid employment, collected and returned several crates of empty beer bottles to the brewery to raise the cash for her children's birthday cakes. She stressed that this was her financial contribution to the party, despite the fact that it had been her husband's and his friends' empty bottles, for which she had collected deposit money (see Chapter 3).

Most middle class urbanites keep mental or written track of their children's birth-dates. These are registered on immunisation cards from clinics, or in other ways. One couple made a poster for their living room wall showing the birth-dates of their five children. People view this kind of recording as something essentially urban and new, many in their middle-age do not know their own exact birth-dates, of which they are slightly ashamed, whereas they are proud that they can be precise about those of their children. They feel that this indicates their level of education, literacy and thereby sophistication, compared to their own parents. In addition, they say that it is important that their children know when their birthdays are for the sake of their participation in a cosmopolitan world when they grow up.

Parents do not necessarily schedule parties on their children's precise birth-dates,

often they arrange them for the closest weekend, and may combine celebrations for more than one child if their birthdays are close together. They generally choose weekends for practical reasons: parents are not at work, and children are not at school. By celebrating more than one birthday on a single day, they save themselves the time and expense of several parties, especially if they have many children. Both men and women take instrumental, although different, roles in planning parties for their children. A couple usually discusses between them when would be the most suitable day, then distribute verbal invitations to selected relatives and friends. They then start to plan what food and drink they need: meat, fish, potatoes, yams, taro, cassava pudding, fruit, vegetables, soft drinks, and beer for men (although beer is not always a part of children's parties, nor at those of members of certain churches).[2]

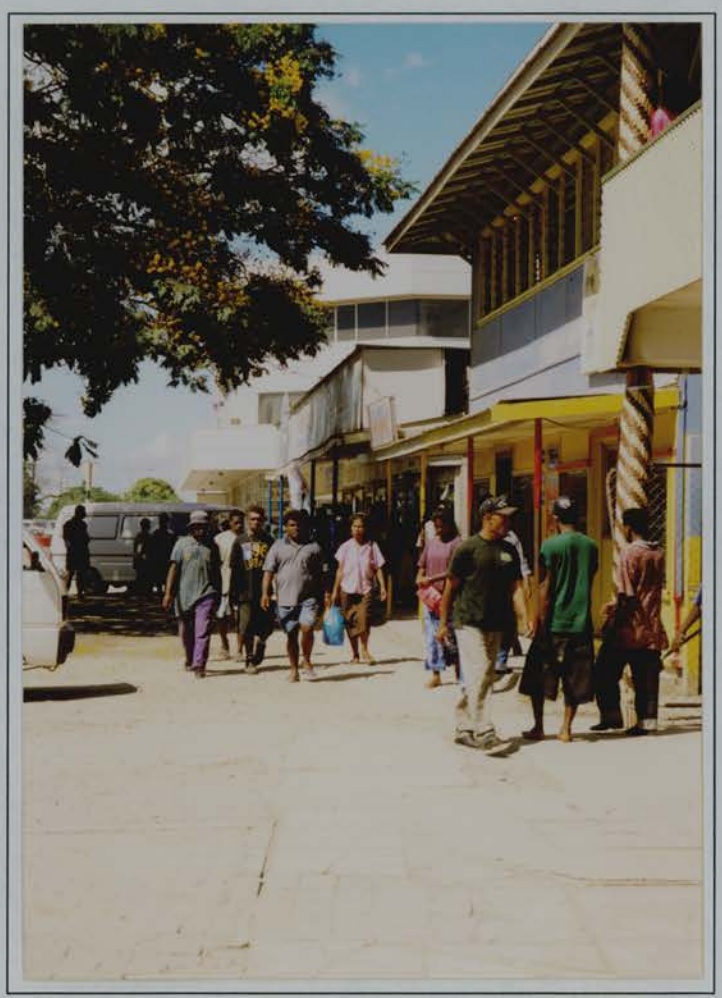

Plate 13: Shopping at Point Cruz.

[2] Certain churches—particularly the Seventh Day Adventist Church—prohibit consumption of alcohol. In practice though, many members of such churches do drink alcohol, although usually in more private settings than parties at houses (see Chapter 6).

Urbanites say that birthday parties are features of town rather than home life, and that many children at home do not know exactly when their birthdays are. Middle-aged Honiarans say that they themselves did not experience birthday parties when they were young, but that they feel that they should provide them for their own children. This said, some do mention that rare parents at home—usually those who are more "educated"—do arrange them, but that they are smaller affairs, without luxurious cake, meat and gifts. Also, many urbanites apply moral weight to parties. For example, they claim that children's birthday parties are correct and appropriate forms of sociability, and not celebrating children's birthdays has connotations of shame. Parents who are unable to hold a party, perhaps for financial reasons, will apologise to their friends profusely (albeit quietly), and express their regret for their child's missing out on a proper celebration. In these ways, people see birthday parties as elements of a new urban sociability, not as something explicitly linked to home. This is despite the fact that some ethnic groups practice *kastom* celebrations at certain stages in children's development (see Ivens 1972: 166), and that conscious non-marking of birth *is* viewed as adherence to *kastom*

In this way, Honiarans draw distinctions rather than parallels between parties in town with those at home. Also, on occasion, they draw distinctions between parties in town, acknowledging that they serve to create hierarchy between households in town. They say that the households that hold the most frequent and lavish parties are those that can afford to do so because the head of household has a well paid and prestigious job (*bik waka*). In addition, the equation of wealth with prestige is intersected by moral standards. Someone may be rich, but if they do not organise events such as parties, then their prestige among friends and relatives is considerably lower than someone who has the same wealth but does the right thing by being sociable and generous. In these ways, although parties follow standardised formats, the variations in extravagance act as important markers of success and prestige, and membership is based on equality with a degree of difference.

Parents of the birthday children invite *some* of their relatives in town to these parties. In addition, people ask their close friends to join in, expecting them also to contribute cooked foodstuffs on the day. Party invitations lay stress on the parent's friends and relatives, rather than the school-mates of their children. This reflects the fact that related children are usually one another's friends, and that parental friendships create friendships between children, rather than the other way around. Inviting people to parties can help to create ties of obligation between households, but more often serves to consolidate those that already exist. If someone is *not* invited to a party held by friends, they are annoyed and grumble, feeling that the ties that they thought they had established are not being upheld by the other

household. If a relative is not invited, then this is more serious, as *kastom* ties of obligation are not being upheld. Hosts who fail to invite all their town-dwelling relatives to such occasions justify their decisions by referring to their relatives' social position. They explain that they do not have transport to get to the house, or more explicitly, that such people might not feel comfortable at such an event because they are not used to them. Essentially, these justifications are statements about class and hierarchy, and act as assertions of superiority over these relatives, in the same way as there often is between neighbours. These "symbolic fences" (Gullestad 1992: 165) between those who invited and those who are not, serve to include same-class people and exclude, and create distance from, others.

Because entire households take part in formal visits, both men and woman are involved. However, this does not mean that men and women perform the same roles as one another. Women are involved in staple food preparation and care of children, while men organise the purchase of expensive foodstuffs and drink, and cook barbecue meats. In this way, formal visiting reflects and enhances the domestic roles of women as nurturers and supporters, and men as economic providers, although such division does not preclude men's nurturance or women's economic input.

Birthday parties socialise children into middle-class roles, and help to establish middle class status for households, though their extravagance and connections with others. This partly explains the moral import of birthday celebrations, and why it is shameful not to hold one for a child. This shame is for the sake of the child *and* for one's friends and relatives. Not holding a party can jeopardise the closeness of relationships with both, and whether invitations are reciprocated and accepted or not, is a statement about the quality, appropriateness and tenacity of relationships (see Meneley 1996: 41; Bourdieu 1990: 98-111). Importantly, parties are seen as fun for both children and adults. Their emotive qualities mark the progress of the child into adulthood, but also the progress of the child and their family into urban, *moden*, middle class status. This is achieved through the content of the party: food, cake and presents; by virtue of who is present; through who is not there; and by people's attempts to downplay ethnic differences during parties. In this way, consumption of certain foods and objects combines with models of sociability to define class identity as "life-style" constituted by "taste" in a similar manner to general household decorations, which I described in Chapter 3 (Bourdieu 1984: 170).

As formal visiting involves whole households, guests usually arrive in family groups, whether by car or foot. While Honiarans use food to reaffirm their affluence and sophistication within households, they use clothing to impress others while moving between houses. To go on a visit, women usually change out of their house-clothes into smarter

outfits. They say it is improper for relatives, friends or colleagues to see them going across town in their more casual attire. Men express less concern about clothing, but might don a smarter shirt for an outing. It matters less to hosts that their guests see them wearing casual clothes, and they rarely change when visitors come. People are concerned that if a chance meeting with friends or relatives happened in town that they will be seen as urban sophisticates, but do not feel the need to demonstrate middle classness within their own houses. This is partly because their guests have already seen them in public spheres, so are aware that their hosts do dress up for such occasions, but is also because there is no need to assert status through clothing when guests arrive, as hosts' houses attest to their inhabitants' class through their size and decorative styles, which constitute "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1977: 179).

Once they have arrived, households do not stay within discrete units, but instead mix with same-sex members of other households. Women and house-girls carry their prepared dishes straight to the indoors kitchen in large cooking pots wrapped in embroidered and appliquéd cloths. They place the pots on a kitchen surface for the women of the house to decide how to lay out the main eating table, usually in the lounge. However, this does not preclude the women guests from becoming involved in the final preparations: they accept instructions from the host women on how to lay out the table, and how to cut food into pieces ready for plates. While they help with the preparations, mothers allow their children to play with one another, often under the eye of their house-girls, whom mothers expect to attend the parties in order to help with the children and clearing up. When men arrive, they usually retire immediately to the veranda to chat and drink beer or soft drinks. Younger, unmarried men often offer to help with more strenuous preparations, for example, if the women need a table moving into position. Once the women have laid the table, they tell the men everything is ready, so that the men move into the lounge and people call out through the house for everyone to gather. Men usually take the prime chairs, women the spare chairs and floor, and house-girls the periphery, in between the kitchen and the lounge. House-girls say that they are ashamed to come fully into the main eating area, or to eat with everyone else, because they feel are less important than the others (see Chapter 3).

Food is a crucial element of all formal visits, and most activities centre around the preparation and consumption of foodstuffs.[3] Food embodies relationships of reciprocity, gender division, and adoption of foreign norms. The term used for these visits is not *fiis* ("feast") which is reserved for larger, more public occasions, and hosts will play down the

[3] White (1991*a*: 43) makes similar observations about the centrality of food and communal eating on Santa Isabel.

food on offer by calling it "a little food" (*lelebet kaikai*), or a "small meal" (*smol tii*). This modesty reflects Honiarans' aversion to overt self-praise, which they say could be read as connoting reluctance to be generous to their guests. However, it is entirely appropriate for guests to express awe at the spread on offer, and the most flattering thing that I could say to a host was, "this isn't a little food, this is a feast!" It is the inclusion of food that gives these events their standardised, regularised appearances, and as such is central to their affect. Communal eating during formal visits is largely convivial, but implicit in the inclusion of certain foods and guests, is the exclusion of others. By using communal eating as a means of sociability in town, people are adopting versions of practices from home. However, they imbue these practices with novel meanings, particularly through the types of food which they choose to bring and supply, which indicate their aspiration to, and inclusion in, urban, middle class life-styles and thereby their exclusion from those whom they see as rural (see Goody 1982; cf. Kahn 1986).

In their preparations, householders expect every female head of guest families to each bring a pot of food with them. Sometimes, women discuss beforehand who will bring what so there is little duplication, but they never ask their guests to bring food, assuming that it will happen. Women say that it is a generic truth in Solomon Islands that one does not go empty handed to someone's house: and that this is *kastom*.[4] Food acts as a marker of the host household's success, as guests note its type, quality and quantity, and plan to emulate the spread at their own future events. Although food is not necessarily commented on, hosts are aware that their guests judge them on it. To this end, hosts always ensure there is more than sufficient, sending their guests away with pots nearly as full as when they came. It is a mean party that does not have leftovers for guests to take away with them.

Guests usually bring stove-cooked or *motu* food as their contributions. As they expect to bring food with them, they either cook their dish the evening before, or in the morning before the party. Meat or fish should be integral parts of such dishes. If someone brings a dish made with *taiyo* as its main protein content, they apologise to their hosts for its inadequacy by saying that they are short of money at the moment. To take an inadequate item is a source of shame for the guest, although a polite host will assure them that their dish is a welcome contribution. A sociable (and therefore sensible) guest will never arrive empty handed, even though people claim that having an invitation removes the obligation to bring something

Birthday cakes are important elements of the food provided at parties. Each birthday

[4] See Ross (1973: 152) on obligation to give gift—particularly of food—to affines in Baegu, north Malaita.

child should have their own, which should be large enough so that pieces may be distributed to each of the guests. Guests and hosts would see a small cake as a sign of parsimony inappropriate to a sociable gathering. In actuality though, it is not essential that everybody tastes the cake: many adults will say that sweet "food is really only suitable for children" (*kaikai wea fitim olketa pikinini nomoa*), and the children always receive the lion's share. Parents order cakes in advance from a bakery or expert cake-maker, then collect them on the day of the celebration. They are usually brightly coloured sweet sponge cakes, which are covered in vibrant icing and emblazoned with the child's name and candles. In 1996, cakes cost as much as SI$60 each, which people explained was very expensive, but would nonetheless always include them at birthday parties.

Alongside food cooked by *motu*, men prepare barbecued beef, sausages and expensive reef-fish on the day of the party. They say that this is men's work, which they enjoy and do well. They also sometimes advise women on preparation of *motu* chicken and fish, often causing much hilarity among women, who say they are perfectly able to cook *motu*. While men prepare the barbecue meat, women are usually putting the finishing touches to the less expensive foodstuffs in the kitchen. Barbecues are becoming an increasingly popular form of special occasion cooking in Honiara, as testament to this, a local clothes store managed to boost sales by giving away "free" iron barbecue plates with every large bale of second-hand clothing purchased. This form of cooking is perceived as that which Australians and other *waetman* ("white people") prefer, especially as it is meat-based. Many people say that Australians, Americans and Europeans mainly eat meat and little else. One woman proudly told me that when she lived in Australia for a year, all she ate was meat, "just as Australians do" (*mi kaikaim mit nomoa, olsem olketa blo Australia*). In this way, people adopt barbecue techniques on special occasions in an explicit attempt to foster foreign foodstuffs and cooking styles, and the fact that meat is expensive in Solomon Islands terms further adds to its desirability. As discussed in Chapter 3, people link *motu* food to *kastom* and *hom* ("Motu is from previous times, we usually cook a lot of motu food at home: "*Motu, hem i blo taem bifor, mifala save mekem planti motu long hom*). Although urbanites appreciate the flavour of *motu* food, they say that it is more commonplace than barbecued meats and is associated with *hom*, and as such does not indicate high status.

As with cooked dishes of food, guests say they are obligated to take gifts to parties, and hosts expect to receive them. Before a party, guests buy birthday presents for the child or children: often toys or clothes, which they wrap in gift-paper and carry to the party in plastic bags. Guests present them to the birthday children at the party, either before or after eating. It is only through cake, gifts and singing "happy birthday", that children are the focus of the

party. Generally, parents leave their children to play or watch videos together while the adults eat and chat, and adults' discussions do not centre exclusively on the children. When people present gifts, it is usually the women who take charge by encouraging their own children to go up to the birthday child, shake hands and put the gift on a pile at his or her feet. Sometimes the wrapped gift is supplemented, or replaced, by cash, which guests also add to the pile. People see cash as an equally appropriate gift, but perhaps as indicating little forethought on the part of the giver. Children unwrap gifts after everyone has left, and it is unusual for either children or parents to give thanks for gifts.

Grace and speeches are also important elements of these gatherings, giving them an air of formality and publicness. Before eating, the male head of the household calls upon a guest to say grace. This is usually a prestigious man, who will be a clergy member if any are present. Occasionally, a woman may be asked to say grace, particularly if she holds a high position within a church group, or is a member of a religious order. Grace is usually short, and thanks God for the food and the life of the child whose birthday it is. Speeches are similarly brief, and are often made by one of the birthday child's uncles. He wishes them a happy birthday; expresses his gratitude to the hosts for arranging the gathering and for their generosity; and thanks the women for their hard work. In these ways, the grace and speech-makers acknowledge the ostensible role of the event as a family gathering for the sake of a child, as well as the work and expense it entails. Thanking a host in a speech acknowledges and publicises the hosts' wealth and generosity, and therefore augments their prestige among friends and relatives. In addition, speech-makers acknowledge both the host male *and* his womenfolk, thus accruing prestige to both the male head of household *and* the household as a unit. However, while the content and form of speeches do have an effect, it is important that this is by no means uniform. In the words of Firth in his discussion of Tikopian *fono*: "He who hears may not listen; he who listens may not accept; he who accepts may not carry out" (1975: 43).

Parties as prestigious displays indicates their roles as network-focused rather than purely child-focused events, as they serve to consolidate connections between urban households. It also explains why unreciprocated invitations cause annoyance, as this implies denial of one's full involvement in the network of friends or relatives. Occasionally though, unintentional guests are present at parties: those who are not explicitly invited, but happen to be visiting the host household when the party is due to take place. When this occurs, the unintentional guest says that they feel ashamed and embarrassed, and may retire to a bedroom while the preparations take place, only to be called upon and welcomed by the hosts when the time comes for the meal and speeches to start. Even though their hosts try to

make them feel relatively welcome, such guests stay on the periphery of the event, by sitting at the edge of the room, and going to the food table last. On one occasion, an unintentional guest was an older female relative of the birthday children, who was visiting from home for a few days. She stayed on the periphery until it was time for speeches, at which point she stood up and asked if she could make a speech. She could not speak *Pijin*, but as the guests were from several different ethnic groups, not all understood her *langguis*. Therefore, she made her speech in *langguis*, while a sister of the household's "boss" translated it in sections. The translator explained that she was grateful to be present at the party celebrating the birthdays of two of her relatives; thanked her hosts for inviting her to stay; and apologised for her unexpected presence and her inability to speak *Pijin*. After speaking, she returned to the corner where she was sitting, and had to be encouraged by relatives to help herself to food when the time came to eat.

It is unusual for an unintentional guest to make such a speech and in part it reflects the woman's relatively high prestige (as an old grandmother) at home. However, although this woman had such position at home, when transposed into town, she felt somewhat embarrassed and inadequate: she had apologised for her presence and her inability to speak *Pijin*. Her hosts did try to make her feel relatively welcome, but did not encourage her to take a central seat, perhaps sensing her discomfort in the context. There was little tension about her presence, other than her own unease, but there was acknowledgement of her peripherality to the event, and hence to the people who were there that day. Although according to *kastom* she was a significant kinsperson—as an old consanguinal relative of the children and family—and felt confident enough to make a speech, she was not part of the urban milieu, which in effect was being celebrated that day.

These events bring households together ostensibly for the children's sake, but also serve to solidify ties between same-class friends and relatives. However, it is important that these events are held for children, as they serve to socialise the children into emerging definitions of what constitutes urban middle class roles. For example, children learn to expect parties and presents from friends as well as kin. In fact, as in the case of the unintentional visitor, they will learn *not* to expect a gift from her (i.e. such that any gifts they give to her will be disinterested: see Chapter 6). They are aware that she does not have the financial ability to do so, and they would probably spurn a home-made gift as inadequate, undesirable and *lokol,* with the (laughing) support of their parents. In this way then, middle class parents encourage their children to valorise that which is urban and middle class, rather than that which is rural and implicitly linked to their relatives.

Although Honiarans take care not to overemphasise ethnic differences at parties, this

does not mean that they are left unmentioned. However, any such discussions usually centre on mundane differences rather than those that might provoke real discord. For example, when women bring their dishes of cooked food, if they have prepared something different to the host's usual style, then the host might ask about the ingredients and where the dish originates from. Or, at one party, a woman brought her tall, wooden pounding bowl to help the hosts in their preparation of savoury cassava pudding. They discussed the bowl as associated with a particular ethnic group, and said how it was different to their own, although they did not judge any as superior or inferior. These formal gatherings could lend everyday ethnic differences a saliency by virtue of the sheer diversity of ethnic backgrounds often present, making them an easy target for conversation. In effect though, this only happens about things seen as trivial. Both guests and hosts tend to push more significant ethnic differences into the background.

In this way, urbanites are more circumspect about discussing ethnic differences during formal visits than if they are alone with their families in private. This is probably because of two factors. First, as these events are *partly* child focused, and these children are often the products of inter-ethnic marriages, then ethnicity becomes difficult to discuss without promoting ruction. Second, the relatively public nature of such events means that unrelated or little known guests may be present, so there is a danger of causing annoyance if serious and emotive matters—such as morality—are discussed in terms of ethnicity. In the same way that ethnic differences are rarely mentioned in truly public arenas (such as in the media, or in the spheres that I discuss in Section 3) for fear of provoking inter-ethnic conflict, only trivial differences are discussed at formal visits, whereas in more private spheres they are often central topics of conversation.

Fund-raising events

Urban households also hold events more explicitly aimed at redefining economic relationships with rural kin. Honiarans say that according to *kastom*, kin should provide financial support to one another, especially at times of great need. However, this ideal is opposed to a reality whereby urban households attempt to hoard their wealth to provide for their immediate families. However, this does not imply that they hold dispassionate views of the needs less affluent relatives, and some urbanites hold fund-raising events at their houses for their kin groups. Although fund-raising events are more commonplace at churches and public venues than in private houses, events at houses are not unheard of. They involve invitations to friends and some relatives, and provide an excellent view of urbanites' manipulations of their economic obligations to kin.

Most families in town do give cash to visiting relatives, or send remittances home. Both types of payments are intended for quotidian expenses such as kerosene and petrol, but also help with larger expenses such as brideprice payments. Errington and Gewertz (1997: 339) see these payments as "investments" rather than commitments to "tradition". Such payments are not just economic investments, but ideological ones too. Carrier and Carrier (1989) point out that remittances from migrants to residents of Ponam serve to keep migrants involved in relationships with people at home through exchange networks, and also show them to be "good and thoughtful Ponams, and build up their social credit" (1989: 216). Strathern (1972: 26-27) sees money sent home by Hageners in Port Moresby as an acknowledgement of ties with home and an assertion that migrants will return at some future point. All such payments not only show commitment, but being able to make them also displays success in town, which people hope will afford them social standing at home. In this way, middle class Honiarans do see their payments to kin as continuing their commitment to home, but view their commitment as based on inequality: they are members of a middle class who hold different, more sophisticated values than their village dwelling relatives.

Errington and Gewertz's (1997) study of the "elite middle class" in Wewak, Papua New Guinea centres on their involvement in the International Rotary Club. By holding fund-raising auctions, they raise money to support "community service". They represent the auction as exemplifying the successful melding of community and self-interest, which is at the heart of an emerging "middle class sociality" (1997: 333). In Honiara, such international organisations do exist, but even those middle class Honiarans with good jobs find it hard to afford membership or participation, and such organisations usually remain the reserve of the elite. In addition, such secular organisations often entail connotations of immorality, which members of the emerging middle class find hard to bear (see Chapter 6). Many middle class people focus their energies into their kin groups, but do so in ways that create a split between themselves and those kin. The fund-raising activities of a group who described themselves as a *wantok klab* ("wantok club") is a particularly interesting manifestation of these energies, which—like the Rotary Club—aimed to raise money for "service", but the service they referred to was the aid of poorer kin.

In Chapter 1, I explained how Honiarans reserve the term *wantok* for relationships between members of ethnic groups that entail some form of reciprocal obligations. Such obligations are often are financial in nature. Members of a particular ethnic group established the *wantok klab* in order to raise cash for particular projects or individuals at home in times of need. For example, if they needed to travel to town for medical attention, or had compensation cases to settle. The club held infrequent fund-raising events at houses in town,

which were seen as similar to birthday parties, as they were fun and brought urbanites together socially. The funds that were raised went into to a specially set up bank account. The club's founders had established a club "committee" of men, who organised fund-raising events, kept track of incoming and outgoing money, and decided whom should receive financial assistance. They expected those who received money from club funds to repay the club at a later date themselves, or—more realistically—their richer urban relatives should do so on their behalf. Committee members also acknowledged that it was not always possible for people to repay, in which case, partial repayment would be acceptable.

Although urbanites justify these activities of the club by saying that helping relatives is the correct and proper way to behave, they temper this in two ways. First, they say that the operation of the club means that all relatives in town contribute their fair share according to their financial ability. Second, they add that formalisation means that requests by relatives are treated in an orderly way rather than on an *ad hoc* basis. The latter produces demands from large sums to individual urbanites at times when they may not be solvent themselves. By removing the possibility of *ad hoc* requests, the club actually appears to weaken bonds with kin, and distance urbanites from home.

Guests bring food to fund-raising events, but their contributions are usually intended for sale to themselves and the other invited guests. This is rather different to the institutional fund-raising I discuss in Chapter 6, where items are for sale to passers-by. Guests and hosts lay out dishes of beef, fish and chicken alongside staple foods and fruits on a table, perhaps outside in the shade if the weather is good. Someone says grace, but formal speeches are not usually made at these events, other than to let people know that food costs a certain sum per plate-full. Guests and hosts help themselves to food, but must put some cash into a box on the table before they eat.

The *wantok klab* also holds games to raise money. Gambling games take place at most fund-raising events, a favourite is "lucky card" (*laki kad*) which is played to win drinks. A dealer removes all diamonds (or any suite at their discretion) from the pack, sells each card for a fixed amount (usually 20 cents if playing for a soft drink, 40 cents for beer, and 10 cents for fruit or cake). When the dealer has sold all of the diamonds, they draw a card at random from the rest of the pack, and whoever holds a matching diamond wins. For example, if the dealer draws a ten of hearts, spades or clubs, then the holder of the ten of diamonds wins. While women and children gamble for soft drinks, men gather elsewhere to gamble for beer. In this manner, at each game the dealer accumulates cash, which amounts to more than the cost of the bottled drink, although the drinks were initially donated freely

either by the hosts or guests.[5]

The *wantok* club illustrates the attempts of the middle class to reconfigure their relationships with kin at home. The men who take lead roles in the club in town are mainly those in professional occupations. Their formalisation of economic assistance to home enables them to consult one another about what are appropriate amounts. Furthermore, the existence of the club acts as a shield from the requests for money from home. Rather than approaching individual kin for assistance, their kin recommend that they approach the club. This serves to distance town dwellers from the demands of home, and provides a degree of autonomy from home. This autonomy is not just for themselves, but also for their households. By protecting themselves from demands of home, they are more able to feed, clothe and educate their families: all of which serve as investments in the future to reproduce and consolidate their middle-class family networks.

Raising cash from those living in town to help people living at home shows urbanites' awareness of the disparity in wealth between home and town. While this is obviously the case as town dwellers have regular incomes, the establishment of a *wantok* club and fund-raising events formalises the relationship between the two spheres. Members of the *wantok* club say that it is a way of helping those at home and preventing unsolicited requests for cash, which can be a drain on their own resources. Furthermore, unlike remittances, the *wantok* club's payments to home are made from a group to individuals, rather than from individuals to individuals. While this can be seen as creating group solidarity between those in town, it also asserts their anonymity and thereby autonomy from specific ties at home. This is because, through the club, urbanites uphold a generalised notion of "the *wantok* system" (*wantok sistem*) as obligation to all kin, rather than engaging with the obligations required by specific kin ties (see Chapters 1 and 6 for fuller descriptions of the *wantok sistem*).

However, the *wantok klab* does not run entirely smoothly. One member complained that some of the "members" in town had "borrowed" from the fund, almost draining it completely. They had promised to repay with interest, but several months later still had not done so. In addition, he added that fund-raising events had started to become less effective, as some people were not participating as much as they had in the past.

The club's problems indicate some of the moral assumptions underlying it, not least in its members attempts to inculcate organised obligation. Urbanites generally like to be seen

[5] Gambling is a popular feature of urban life, not only in the casinos (see Chapter 7), but also at household fund-raising events, as well as more public ones, such as school fêtes, market stalls and some church occasions.

helping their relatives, as this shows them to be morally upright. Because of this, the *wantok klab* upholds and augments the status of those who participate in the *wantok* club's activities. By being involved, urbanites hope that others will see them as good people who contribute to the well-being of relatives at home. However, it is not only *wantok* who are implicated in the activities of the club: affines and friends also become embroiled in its system by their participation in fund-raising events. In this way, a wider circle of people are brought together and claim their status as relatively wealthy urbanites in the eyes of the *wantok* who are holding the event, as well as (albeit invisibly) their relatives at home. By being involved in friends' and affines' fund-raising events, they are asserting their solidarity with the club members, not as *wantok*, but as people who occupy the same moral-social space of town. Like informal visits and birthday parties, they are assertions of middle classness in the face of their belief in the poverty of those at home.

Visits home

Both birthday parties and fund-raising activities mobilise whole households in town and consolidate class position through appropriating foreign forms, and reformulating obligations to relatives. Occasionally, urban families also make visits home. These trips are particularly common at Christmas, but urbanites also visit home to attend events of family significance such as funerals, or to make business arrangements. Although I only discuss them briefly here, urban rhetoric about visits home shows them to be as important as visits in town for the formation of urban sociality for two reasons. First, the visits colour urbanites' views of rural life-styles. Second, urbanites may use such visits to reinforce their social distance from their hosts at home.

When a family goes home to visit, they usually leave one or more members of their household to stay in town and protect the house from burglary. Their preparations may last several days, as they organise tickets and shop for items to take with them. Families would not dream of going home empty handed, and always take ample provisions with them. Standard items include sacks of rice and flour; cooking oil; cartons of *taiyo*, noodles and biscuits; gas canisters and kerosene; and extras such as milo,[6] sugar, powdered milk, sweets, and fabric. While these are provisions for themselves, they are also gifts for their relatives. While some urbanites present gifts to each household at home, others say that the items are for themselves, but that they must show generous hospitality to the people there. As a man from north Malaita explained to me: "We had to take a lot of things with us. We took gas,

[6] Milo is a malted milk drink produced by Nestlé. It is popular in the Solomon Islands among almost everyone, although its relatively high cost makes it a rare treat for those on low incomes.

two sacks of flour, oil, five sacks of rice, and many other things. When you are staying at home, if people come to your house, you have to give them food." Families in town go to considerable expense in order to take such items with them, and going home with only scant offerings is not an option, as people say they would feel ashamed to do so.

Visiting home is easier for Honiarans from nearby areas such as Guadalcanal, Malaita or Central Provinces. Those from further afield say that it is not only the cost of the gifts that makes them unable to visit frequently, but is also the cost of the fares. Coupled with a young family, who would be uncomfortable on a long boat trip, this makes visits home rare events. Despite their relative affluence in town, many Honiarans explained that they are not able to go home very often because of the expense involved and their reluctance to avail of cheap, uncomfortable modes of transport, as shown in plate 14.

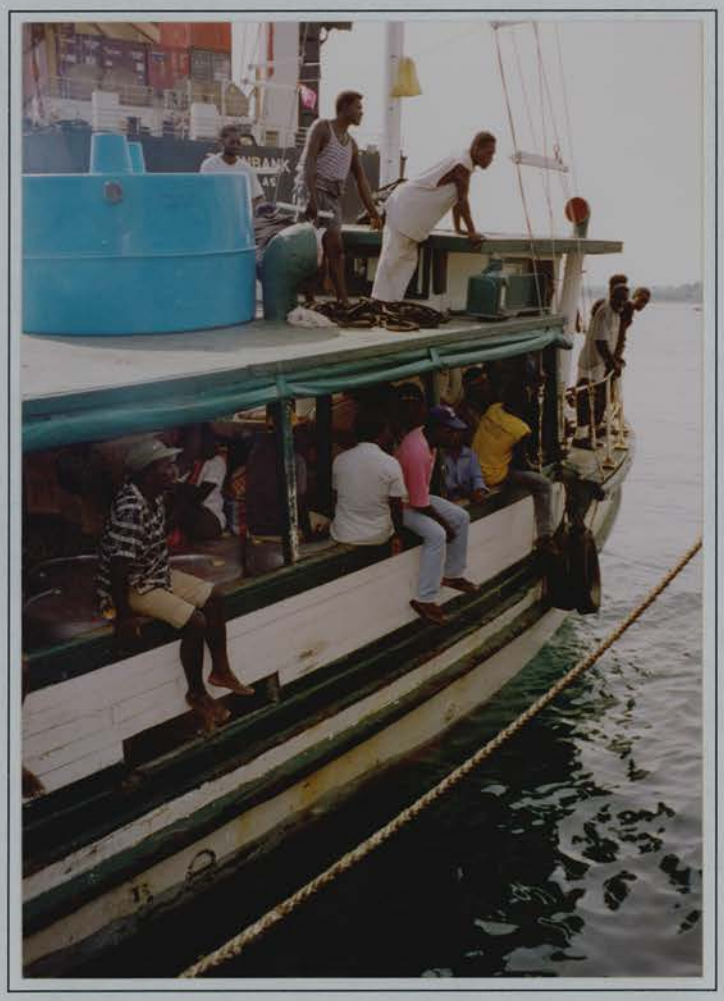

Plate 14: Passenger boat on its way from Honiara to Choiseul.

In Chapter 3, I explained how some urbanites arrange for houses to be built for them at home in preparation for their planned retirement, but that these houses are primarily built of "permanent" materials. While the owners are resident in town, usually some of their relatives occupy such houses and may repair them when necessary. If urbanites visit home for a holiday, which may be for over a month at a time, they expect their relatives to temporarily vacate the houses to allow them to stay. Such houses afford considerable prestige to the urbanites who build them, as markers of difference from their rural relatives who live in houses made of timber and sago palm thatch: *lif hoas* ("leaf houses"). Similarly, urbanites' arrival home laden with expensive store-bought goods marks them out as successful in the urban milieu.

When urbanites can afford to make visits home, they discuss such trips with relish. They explain at length and with obvious pride exactly how many items they took—or plan to take—with them as gifts for relatives. Despite this clear assertion of material superiority to their rural relatives, they also discuss visits home with a certain amount of nostalgia. In particular, they focus upon the availability of fresh food: especially fish, fresh pork, and delicacies such as turtle or hornbill. They delight in cool rivers to swim in and shady trees to sit under, comparing the home environment favourably to the alternating dust and mud of Honiara. A woman explained her children's delight at going home: "The children don't like to stay in town, they like to go home where they can paddle canoes, and go to look at the *kastom* stones on the hill in my mother's land." Honiarans see taking children to visit relatives at home as important, and they make much of children's ability to learn *langguis* quickly when there (see Chapter 1). However, while this is in part a way of encouraging ethnic identity, such knowledge often falls into disuse as soon as families return to town. As Battaglia has pointed out in her description of urban Trobrianders' yam displays, nostalgia is not solely a sentiment about the past, it also releases a "productive capacity" in those who indulge in it (1995*b*: 93). In this way, Honiarans' nostalgia for the qualities of home and their brief valorisation of *langguis* may be part of their achievement of distance from it, not as an epiphenomenon of that distance, but as a means of reaffirming and achieving it.

This is clarified in the way that their nostalgia about home is affected by the control that urbanites say that they feel themselves under on visits, this is especially pronounced among mixed-ethnicity families. When each member of a married couple hails from a different home, their experiences at each other's homes may entail a sense of feeling out-of-place: a stranger. First, the couple must privilege one "side's" home over another for a visit. Some couples explain that they alternate their trips, so that they spend one Christmas at the wife's and the next at the husband's. More unusually, some families "split" themselves to go

home, such that the wife takes some of their children to her home, and the husband takes some to his. This is largely a matter of personal choice, and depends on circumstances. When a person visits their spouse's home, they say that they try to act with respect for the *kastom* of their affines, but many find it difficult. The *langguis* may elude them, *kastom* such as menstrual seclusion may seem alien, and the presence of their affines' ancestors in the form of ghosts may frighten them. Ancestors may make their presence felt in dreams, visitors saying that such dreams show that the ancestors saw them as a stranger, and hence underline their alienation from their spouse's home. While they feel protected by their spouses, such dreams are still unnerving, and discussed only later in hushed tones once safely back in town. Also, some women say that they fear going to live in their husband's villages because they are not known and therefore would be more likely to be objects for creepers (see Chapter 3). In these ways, adhering to *kastom* and succumbing to the opinions and judgements of relatives (whether alive or dead) become important—if difficult—points of trips home that urbanites must negotiate. As well as the expense of gifts and fares, being expected to behave in certain unaccustomed ways means that such visits can present enough strain to prevent frequent trips. While such differences in *kastom* also make themselves felt in town—especially when visitors come from home—when in the provinces, urbanites feel less control and more anxiety than in their neutral territory of town, which is uninhabited by affines and ghosts.

Conclusions

Middle class Honiarans place great emphasis on their participation in formal visiting events in town. If they are unable to hold a birthday party for their children, they explain that they feel ashamed, and if they are not invited to such events then they (quietly) express annoyance at their exclusion. While these events are momentary, they consolidate enduring relationships between affluent urban households. By establishing such ties, Honiarans are investing in future aspirations and securing the success of their nuclear families, rather than extended kin groups (cf. Rowlands 1994: 164).

Formal visits help to create standardised sociability and makes relationships between households public and enduring. Middle class urbanites stabilise urban life and counter their perceptions of the transience of urban life by participating in formal gatherings (see Miller 1994). Paradoxically, at the same time as urbanites try to make urban life less transient and more enduring, they undermine the durability of ties with home by subtly excluding rural relatives from their urban events. In this way they are upwardly and outwardly mobile: creating new social practices and connections away from home. Honiarans' efforts with their

kin during formal visits entail both of these processes.

Urbanites justify their physical exclusion of rural and less affluent relatives from birthday parties by claiming that they neither have the financial ability, nor the knowledge of how to participate. If rural relatives are included—as in the case of the unintentional guest at the birthday party—then they are made relatively welcome but not overly encouraged to forgo their own sense of difference. Furthermore, as the *wantok klab* showed, Honiarans manipulate and employ *kastom* values—such as reciprocity—in order to define rural relatives as marginal.

Infrequent trips home by urban families further exacerbate this social (and physical) distance, and serve to stress the integrity of family units in town. However, they indicate how this independence is tinged with nostalgia for home, but how that nostalgia does not imply a wish to engage fully in home life-styles, but a desire to maintain distance from them. Also, as inter-household visits made by family units are essentially small-scale public events, serious issues of ethnic differences are downplayed—made "quiet"—to avoid the risk of conflict. In the following chapter, I describe how individuals break off from households to visit one another, but how such visits are affected by connection to home and house, and entail frank discussions of ethnicity behind closed doors.

Chapter 5

Honiarans on the move: informal visits

In the final chapter of this section, I continue to look at the links forged between middle class households through their visiting practices, but focus on the actions of individuals rather than families. I examine the minutiae of individuals' informal visits to one another and compare relationships between kin to those between friends. Honiarans make short-term (one day only), informal, and often impromptu visits as a favourite recreation. Also, they play host to relatives from home who may be staying elsewhere in town, but come to visit them for the day. Previously, I have shown how formal visiting incorporates some of the elements of sociability which are undergoing change and redefinition: how urban families reformulate their links with rural relatives to obtain distance from them and secure the integrity of their nuclear families. In this chapter, I discuss how individual middle class Honiarans achieve similar ends by redefining personal kinship relationships, and creating friendships as alternative modes of social interaction. I show how urbanites do this by adopting and adapting idioms of kinship such as food sharing, and common interest in home and morality. In this way, they redefine themselves as members of households, yet obtain a certain degree of autonomy and independence from their households, as well as furthering their sense of independence from home.

Unlike formal visits where entire households visit one another's houses, informal visits entail strict gender segregation, such that women visit other women, and men visit other men. Urbanites say that this gives them considerably more freedom ("*fil fri*") to chat than during formal visits, when their spouses or opposite-sex adults are around. Interestingly, men tend to discuss rather different issues than women when they visit each other, but they also value the privacy of such visits, as it affords freedom to discuss sensitive issues. Uhl (1991) describes how women in Andalucia conceal their friendships with one another. She suggests that they do so in order to prevent people criticising them for breaking (male) norms of appropriate household decorum. Neither men nor women in Honiara express the need to disguise their friendships, however, decorum is an important part of their execution. Honiarans must conduct friendships in private, in order to avoid their discussions of inflammatory topics—particularly ethnicity—causing offence. As such, they avoid criticism and maintain the norms of decorum that their ethnically-plural sociality demands.

In this chapter, I introduce the development of friendships and the general decorum of informal visiting. I describe the visits made by women, followed by an exploration of those made by men.

The situational factors of friendships

Leyton describes friendships as composed of both "affective" and "instrumental" aspects (1974: 13), and Carrier suggests that friendships also entail "situational factors" (Carrier n.d.: 13). Affective content of Honiarans' friendships includes sentimental, voluntary bonds, which form the basis for the instrumental qualities of such relationships: such that friends provide mutual support and advice to one another, especially at times of difficulty. Friendships in Honiara also have a broader impact, as they create and maintain connections between urbanites of similar class positions. In particular, inter-ethnic friendships are one of the arenas in which people negotiate ethnic differences, and create practices which are acceptable to all. These are not always hybrid forms, but are often those that acknowledge and accept ethnic diversity. As such, Honiarans' friendships are moral bonds of obligation, and acceptance, which foster standardised norms for behaviour that transcend ethnicity (cf. Strathern 1975: 291).[1]

As I mentioned in my discussion of formal visits, friendships do not usually emerge between unrelated neighbours. While visits to friends and relatives across town are everyday occurrences, visits to neighbours are less common. Sustained friendships that result in informal visits tend to develop in more stable, long-term settings: at work; or with former school-mates. Both men and women interweave their discussions of the affective and instrumental nature of their friendships with references to these situational factors, they mention how they met and became involved with one another. Even more than twenty years after finishing their education, people will still call a friend their "school mate" (*skul meit*) or "class mate" (*klas meit*).

In the same way that mobility for education encourages inter-ethnic marriages, attendance at schools and colleges is also responsible for promoting durable inter-ethnic friendships. Educational bureaucracy ensures that students are often sent to residential schools outside their home provinces. Through this, students meet and form lasting friendships with members of any of the ethnic groups of the Solomon Islands. Although the relocation of students to different provinces is explicitly for bureaucratic rather than ideological reasons, many educated people acknowledge the role which schools played in fostering inter-ethnic connections and thereby their acquisition of knowledge of other cultures. They claim that this "opened their eyes" to a variety of practices—ranging from

[1] Bloch (1973: 77) states "we commonly find that relationships classed by the actor as political, neighbourhood, or friendship have shorter term than those classed as kinship and thus are less moral". While ties of friendship may be shorter term than ties of kinship, here I suggest that they are different, but no less moral than ties between kin.

diverse marital arrangements to notions of politeness and respect—and that this made them more tolerant of difference. Alongside this, many use their education and resulting well-paid secure employment as markers of their distinctiveness from, and superiority to, people at *hom*, or those they call *lokol*. A common way for middle class people to disparage—or to forgive—someone's crassness, is to say: *olketa no skul gud* ("they aren't well educated").

However, some have achieved affluence and middle class life-styles without the benefit of a high level of education, instead using entrepreneurial skills or employment in a church administration to achieve such success, as I discuss in Chapter 6. These people represent themselves as the anomalies that prove the rule: that they are the few who have succeeded without much education. To stress this point, they make constant reference to their lack of education in a joking fashion, whether in conversation or in speeches. By doing this, they claim respect for their strength and tenacity which made it possible for them to overcome their relative lack of education. Like well-educated people, such self-achievers lay great store by their inter-ethnic friendships as markers of their sophistication and modernity.

Informal visiting movements across town

Individual visiting practices enable urbanites to create and maintain friendships with non-kin in town while distancing themselves from kin at home.[2] As Gullestad (1984: 153) points out for working class Norwegian women: "visiting is essential for the formation, maintenance and development of their friendships." Although I do not mean to imply an "artificial separation" of friendship from kinship (Peletz 1995: 361), I suggest that people creatively employ values of kinship to create friendships and recreate kinship. Further, it seems that Honiarans construct their friendships in opposition to relationships with kin of a different class, and that within both types of relationships, aspiration to membership of the middle class influences the way in which they are made.[3] I explain how during their private visits, friends' discussions of ethnicity and urban life entail vocal discussions of the tensions between *hom* and *taun*, *kastom* and *moden*, and ethnic groups, in ways that are not seen beyond the bounds of the closed doors and hushed tones of private arenas.

As middle class people's friends and relatives are scattered throughout the suburbs, they travel reasonably long distances to see one another. Generally, women move around town by bus or taxi, but if cash is short and the distance not too far, then they may walk. People favour cars or four-wheel drive vehicles as an easier and more prestigious means of

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[3] However, this discussion is not meant to provide a thorough exploration of the emotional content of kinship and friendship. See, for example, Lutz (1988), Trawick (1992), and Wikan (1990).

transport, although these are often only available to men. Apparent frequency of movement for visiting is cross-cut by restrictions which rely on notions of gender and sexual probity. As discussed in Chapter 3, a woman may not be on her own outside her house after dark without others calling her sexual propriety into question. If she is out at night, then her friends and relatives, both male and female, criticise her, and say that she does not "stay quietly" (*stap kuaet*) at her house as she should. Women allay such allegations of impropriety by not going out after dark, unless accompanied by their husbands or close male relatives. For similar reasons, they avoid going visiting on their own, instead they take at least one of their children, or a house-girl with them. Even if they leave a house-girl at their house to prepare the evening meal, women say that they need to go back to help prepare the house for their husband coming in from work. Because of this, while visiting, women are aware of the sun becoming lower in the sky as an indication of when they need to start making their way back their own house. Alongside the moral proscriptions about movement, women adopt these strategies because of their fear of assault by strangers. In this way, it is not just that women's travel is controlled by other women and men, but that they actively circumscribe their own movements because of their fear of censure *and* attack.

Men find that their wives may chide them if they do not account for their own movements, and as I discussed earlier, this may have serious, violent repercussions for wives. However, men are less concerned than women about their movements, and freely move around town after dark, only exercising caution for fear of violence, rather than concern for their moral probity. Because of this, men's visits to one another may last long into the night.

Notions of morality and appropriate sociability also influence descriptions of visiting. When going on a visit, Honiarans always do so on a pretext other than *just* going to chat. Women take food that someone has brought from home or they have grown; take some flower or plant seeds; go to discuss a forthcoming event; or take sewing with which they need some help. In this way, they avoid friends and relatives labelling them as idle gossips: as "a person who talks too much" (*man save toktok tumas:* see Chapter 3). If pressed, however, women laugh and say really their main goal is to go to see someone in person and have a protracted chat. After all, they could easily discuss specific issues over the telephone. Men feel less compunction to explain their visits as other than opportunities to chat, but nonetheless often do explain their visits to one another as necessary for work or personal business. For example, they say that their visits are in order to make financial arrangements for kin, or to discuss land disputes at home.

While most urbanites are always careful to lock their doors at night or when they are away from the house, because of fear of intruders, they leave their front doors open or unlocked during the day. This reflects the fact that household activities centre on the outside as well as the inside of the house: children play indoors and outdoors; women cook, cut the grass, and work on their vegetable patches; house-girls wash clothes and bedding in outside laundries. Unlocked doors also show a welcoming, open attitude to visitors, who will comment if a door is locked when they arrive. The host will invariably offer a plate of food to her guest, even if this means cooking up a fresh batch. As in most social situations, food is a central element of visits. Hosts never ask guests whether they would like to eat, but merely put a plateful in front of them. Guests never refuse food, but always eat, even if they have just consumed a full meal at their own house. It is considered inappropriate to reject food, although it does not matter whether host and guest eat at the same time or not.

Women's visits

Women who do not work during the week usually visit one another on week-days. Those who have jobs tend to go visiting at the weekends, or during the afternoon after work. Women's daytime visits usually last several hours, from late morning until just before dusk.

In order to be sociable, women should reciprocate visits, and take care to spend a reasonable length of time at others' houses when visiting. Also, they should take small gifts, eat the food that hosts supply, chat, and be open about themselves and their current concerns. Not following these guidelines causes a certain amount of disaffection. If friends fail to visit for several months, then women become disgruntled. When such friends finally do come, they always apologise for not visiting sooner, and cite excuses such as illness. Similarly, women complain if friends are not open enough with them, for example, if they conceal pregnancy or illness. Although concealment of pregnancy is commonplace, women see such disguise as unwillingness to ask for support, and indicative of lack of trust. As these are both important elements of strong friendships, then their absence is problematic. Such misdemeanours are especially serious if women view such wrong-doers as their "best friends" (*bes fren*), and may sanction them by a few harsh words, perhaps softened by humour.

Most outdoors house-work takes place in the early morning before the sun's heat becomes too strong, or rain starts. Visiting usually happens after these early morning chores are finished, either in late morning or in the early afternoon when the sun is not at its peak. When a visitor arrives at the house, they usually call out through the open door for their friend, and wander in without waiting to be asked. They assume that their host will hear the

call; as if calling performs the act of hearing too, a phenomenon often noted by ethnographers of the Pacific.[4] Their host hurries away from whatever they are doing, and greets them while apologising if they were asleep. Opening pleasantries include offering a drink of cold water to quench their visitor's thirst; questions about the journey across town: whether they walked or took the bus; which route they came by; and whether the town centre is busy today.

Women often bring gifts of food to one another's houses, such as taro from home or bread from a store. Hosts may prepare some of the food to eat during the visit, but are not obliged to do so. Hosts always provide some kind of food for their visitors, although eating is not a time for chat, which begins after everyone has finished. Meanwhile, their children play with each other and women nurse their babies. After chatting, women and children often sleep for an hour or two before waking and noting that it is time for the guests to leave. Hosts often wrap up some fruit from the garden, or flower seeds for their guests to take away with them; then they walk to the end of the road with their guests to say good-bye.

When women visit, they talk about many things: gossip about people; home versus life in town; health; and practicalities like sewing or crochet patterns for home decoration. However, discussions about ethnic differences and the disparities between town and village life are uniting themes, which run through all these topics of chat. Below, I provide two examples: Mary, a Malaitan woman, who comes to visit her daughter Joyce; and Esther, who visits her friend Kate, whom she met at school and has known for several years. Their visits show how mother and daughter discuss similar issues to the two friends, but highlights how they discuss the issues in radically different ways. In particular, the urban friends claim that impropriety in town is akin to that at home, whereas the rural mother claims that impropriety in town is at odds with behaviour at home. This disagreement serves to create distance between kin, and strengthen ties between friends. Relatives who share similar socio-economic positions conduct their relationships in much the same way as friends.

Mary and Joyce: mother and daughter

Mary visits her daughter quite often, usually every month or so. She is Malaitan, but now lives an hour's drive away from Honiara on Guadalcanal, where her husband has purchased some land. When she comes, she brings a granddaughter with her, whom she looks after for one of her other daughters. Sometimes, other relatives come too, including her husband who spends the day at his son's house. Mary usually brings fruit and vegetables to sell at

[4] For example, see Myers and Brenneis' discussion of the power of Pacific oratory (1984).

Honiara's main market on Fridays. She travels to town in the back of an open truck which operates as a paid transport service to the area where she lives. Often she brings several sacks full of garden produce, which she sells in the morning at the market. While Mary is at the market, Joyce and her sisters, who also live in town, go and visit her at the market to chat. Mary usually gives her daughter's children pieces of fruit, and gives her daughters particularly good produce, which she has kept to one side for them. While together at the market, Joyce and Mary sit and chat with each other under the shade of the market roof, while the children eat fruit and play beside the market stall. By late afternoon, Mary has sold most of her goods, so spends some of her taking on kerosene and cloth to take back to her house. She saves the rest of the money for other household and family expenses. She explains that she always tries to find taxis driven by *wantok,* whom she trusts not to overcharge her, for her journey to her daughter's house with any leftovers from the market. When her mother arrives, Joyce makes sure the house-girl brings her a substantial plateful of rice and *taiyo* (tinned tuna). Sometimes Mary sleeps at Joyce's house overnight, but more often she takes a ride in the truck back to her own house before dusk falls.

During Mary's visit to Joyce's house in the afternoons after market, they follow a fairly standard pattern of chatting, eating and sleeping. Sometimes they watch videos too, and as I have mentioned in Chapter 3, these are usually action movies. The discussion does not centre on the movie, about which people only make brief interjections; instead the women talk about their relatives. They make clear distinctions between those living at home (on Malaita), and those living in town or elsewhere on Guadalcanal. Their conversations often take place in *langguis*, but if anyone from a different language group is present, then the women consider it polite to include them in the conversation by speaking *Pijin*. They only make short humorous asides in *langguis*, and usually translate these for anyone in their company who does not understand, from fear that they might be seen as secretly gossiping (*tok haed*).

After Mary has eaten, she sits and chats with Joyce while the video plays. They begin by discussing who was at the market today, and the problem of unreliable and expensive transport to Mary's house. Then they chat about Mary's garden and how good the soil is, but how it is now the dry-season and not enough water for the plants. Joyce asks if Mary still has problems with water access? Mary says that she does, and that this is because of two factors. First, a Guadalcanalese landowner, who lives higher up on the hillside, refuses to turn on the tap for the water pipes unless they pay him some money. Second, a group of her husband's affines have settled at the river, and are arguing with her family about land ownership, so try to block their access to the river. Both women agree that the problem

with water access is because of the fact that the landowners belong to a different ethnic group. They also agree that the affines think that they can claim ownership rights to the area because they are the family of Mary's husband's brother's wife. After Mary's husband's brother's death, and the subsequent death of his wife, her brother and his family came to Guadalcanal to try to claim some of Mary's husband's land, which he had paid for. Mary points out that this is not following *kastom*, as Malaitan land-tenure inheritance is patrilineal. This leads the women to discuss the problem of overcrowding on Malaita, and comment that there are houses everywhere, along the roads, up hillsides deep into the bush. They say that this is why so many Malaitans have moved to Guadalcanal and into town.

Mary complains that she dislikes town: that it is too busy, hot and dusty, that everything costs money, and that people live on rice and *taiyo* (*kaikai blo waetman*) rather than wholesome garden produce (*lokol kaikai*).[5] She asks how Joyce's children are, and comments that one of her sons is too thin. Joyce replies that he will only eat rice and *taiyo*. Mary disapproves, and tells her daughter to encourage him to eat garden foods, like the ones she has brought, otherwise he will not become strong. She tells her daughter to improve her small garden by taking some good quality soil from near her own house on Guadalcanal, while bemoaning the fact that such soil is not as good as at home on Malaita.

Mary asks her daughter if one of her nieces is still staying at the house, Joyce replies that she is, but that she appears to have a boyfriend. This is a problem as it shows that Joyce and her husband are unable to keep an adequate watch over the girl's activities. Again, Mary disapproves, saying that it would be better if the niece stayed at home with her parents, rather in town where she cannot be supervised. However, Joyce reminds her mother that her niece was sent to town to avoid a developing relationship with a married man at home. Joyce asks Mary how her uncle is, and whether his forthcoming marriage to Annie will go ahead. Mary is unsure, castigating Annie's brothers for asking too much brideprice for a woman who already has three children. She says it is because they belong to a different ethnic group, who conventionally practice high brideprice payments, and neither belong to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, nor South Sea Evangelical Church: the former bans brideprice altogether, and the latter sets fixed (low) rates.[6] She sees such high payments as improper because they make brideprice unaffordable. Joyce agrees and laughs.

Mary then asks if Joyce will go to Western Province with her husband and children at Christmas. Joyce is unsure, especially as when she went before she had bad dreams, as she

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[5] In Chapter, I have discussed how distinctions between *kaikai blo waetman* and *lokol kaikai* entail a set of assumptions and assertions about ethnicity and child nurturance.
[6] See Kwa'ioloa & Burt (1997: 79).

was in a strange place. However, she adds that she would like her children to go again, so that they can meet their uncles and aunts and get to know the "ways" (*wei*) of her husband's people. She speculates that her husband will go alone with her oldest son, leaving her to stay with her other children and Mary over Christmas.

After chatting for a while, Joyce's baby wakes up and starts to cry, so she goes to comfort him. Meanwhile, Mary bathes in the outside laundry, then prepares herself to walk back to the market-place where she will meet her husband to travel back to their house by truck. As her mother starts to walk through the front door, Joyce dips her hand into her pocket, takes out a folded twenty-dollar note, and presses it into her mother's hand. Mary tucks the note into her bag, and the two women walk together to the end of the road before taking leave of one another.

Esther and Kate: friends

When Esther goes to visit her friend Kate at her house at the other side of town, their conversations are similar to those at Mary's house: they talk about other people in terms of their ethnic identities, and how their *kastom* relates to their behaviour. However, as the conversation is between friends rather than a mother and daughter, they talk less about family affairs, and prefer to gossip about neighbours and friends by emphasising their sexual demeanour. There are other, more subtle differences between this visit and that of Mary to Kate's house, which I discuss below. Esther and Kate always speak *Pijin* with one another, as neither knows the other's *langguis*. Their topics of discussion are often the same on different visits.

When Kate visits Esther, she usually takes her oldest son with her, who spends his time playing with Kate's children. She leaves her other children in the care of her house-girl. She travels across town by bus, as Kate's house is two miles away, and there is no short-cut by footpath. Esther usually takes some produce brought from home by relatives, and puts this in Kate's kitchen when she arrives. As usual, they eat then chat for a while in the living room where a breeze comes in from the open veranda. Kate does not cook the taro, which Esther has brought. Instead, she provides plates of rice with *taiyo*, and they chat about the virtues of food from home. They are both from different areas of Malaita, but agree that taro from Malaita is much sweeter than from Guadalcanal. Kate says that she saw some Malaitan taro at the market last week, but that it was significantly more expensive than Guadalcanal taro which does not have to be brought to market by ship. Nonetheless, her husband had asked her specifically to buy some Malaitan taro, so she bought a small heap for SI$5, and was glad of it herself. Esther asks Kate how her husband is, Kate replies that everything is

fine, but that she is tired of him staying out late drinking, and wasting money that should be spent on the retirement house they are building at home. Kate, in hushed tones, adds that her neighbours often fight and argue late at night when the husband returns from drinking and gambling sessions: she thinks they argue about the money he loses, but it is also rumoured that the husband is having an affair. She does not really know her neighbour well, but has heard this from one of her relatives who lives in another house nearby. They said that the husband is having an affair with a woman from one particular ethnic group, whom he met at a casino. Esther says that it is, "the way of people from that place" (*wei blo olketa blo ples ia)*, and asks Kate where the married couple are from? Kate replies that they are from a different province to either Esther or herself. She adds that in addition to the ethnicity of the woman who is having a relationship with the married man, his ethnicity is also a contributory factor. Both Esther and Kate agree that men from that ethnic group are often unfaithful to their spouses.

Shifting topic, Esther complains that she feels tired all the time, Kate asks her if she has been to the clinic? Esther has, but the nurse just gave her pain-killers, which do not seem to help, so she is thinking about going to see a Choiseulese "custom doctor" (*kastom dokta*), whom many of her friends have been to see. Kate has heard of this doctor too, and says that she has heard that her medicine works well, even for curing cancer, so suggests that her friend goes. Both women say that the *kastom dokta* treats people from everywhere in Solomon Islands, and expatriates too.[7] Both agree that the doctor's efficacy stems from her ethnic background, as members of her ethnic group possess knowledge of powerful medicinal plants and magical substances.

Esther moves on to ask Kate about her house decorations, as she often does. Kate has many of these, particularly shell ornaments and crocheted doilies. Esther asks her friend if she will show her how to make certain crochet patterns, as she finds them difficult. Kate laughs, and tells Esther that they are easy, but that she should ask Jane to show her. Jane is one of Esther's affines, from another ethnic group, who makes exceptionally intricate crochet doilies and bags. Esther agrees that she will, but adds that Jane is so skilled at crochet because of her ethnicity. Girls and women of that ethnic group make string bags from a young age: this makes them dextrous at working with thread. Kate laughs, and tells Esther that she could learn too if she tried, and should do so to make her house look nice. On

[7] This is the case. During my work in Honiara, I spent many hours with this custom doctor. She treated up to 100 patients a week, who often came from the provinces especially for a consultation with her.

previous occasions, Kate has given shell ornaments and crochet doilies to Esther for decorating her house.

Esther concludes the conversation by inviting Kate and her family to a forthcoming party at her own house. It will be a birthday party for one of her daughters. Kate says that she will come, and asks who else will be there? Her friend answers that her husband wants it to be a small affair which is not too expensive, so only relatives, affines and Kate's family are invited (both Kate and her husband are friends with Esther's household). Kate asks how Esther's sister-in-law is these days, whether it is true that she will marry a man from a nearby island. Esther says that she thinks it is true, and that the wedding may be next year, but that despite the fiancé being from that ethnic group ("*nomata man ia hem i blo* ..."), he seems to be a kind and upright man. Kate nods, laughs, and says that these qualities are unusual.

Esther soon notes that the sun is starting to move lower in the sky, so starts to take her leave of Kate, and calls her child in from where he is playing outside. They go out into the front garden, where Esther admires Kate's flower bed. Kate pulls some seeds off a plant, and wraps them in a plastic bag for her friend to take back to her house. Then they walk to the bus stop together, where Kate waits until she sees her friend and her son are on the bus and safely on their way.

Interlocking themes: the work of visiting

In the two visiting relationships, despite an apparent commonality of themes, the different nuances in their conversations reveal new formulations of social ties. The mother and daughter discuss ethnic differences in the light of disputes over land; Christmas visits; and religious differences evidenced by brideprice requests. They also discuss the difference between home and town in the context of food, soil, and the wayward niece. The two friends discuss ethnic difference in terms of food, the custom doctor, and the morality of potential spouses. They also talk about town and home through the sexual morality of their neighbours, which is also tied to ethnic differences. In both conversations there is a concern with ethnicity, and comparisons between home and town. Although the mother does not live there anymore, she tries to strengthen her daughter's links to home, for example, by suggesting that her daughter should feed *lokol kaikai* to her children. In contrast, I suggest that the friends support each other's ties to town and engagement in a multi-ethnic milieu. Such a difference becomes particularly clear in the women's discussions of sexual behaviour. In Chapter 2, I described how urbanites claim that immoral sexual behaviour is increasing throughout the country, which conflicted with rural peoples' claims that town is less moral than home. Sometimes, such simplistic assertions are further complicated by urbanites'

stereotypical views of other ethnic groups as less moral than their own. In this way, the rural mother valorises *all* homes as moral spaces, but her daughter disagrees. On the other hand, when chatting with each other, the urban sophisticates offer a more complex interpretation of the situation, by valorising their *own* homes as moral spaces, but *others'* homes as essentially immoral.

The daughter does not verbally reject her mother's attempts to tie her to home, nor does she reject the commonality of their *kastom* or Christian beliefs, for instance, in their agreement about brideprice. However, her actions reject many of notions of homeness that her mother is seeking to preserve. For example, she feeds her children and her mother town food. She also reaffirms their difference in affluence by giving her mother some money when she leaves. Through these actions she is maintaining a relationship with her mother as one of her kin, but is also asserting her distance from her mother, which is one of class (and admittedly, of generation). On the other hand, the friends usually eat the same food as one another, and exchange home decoration tips, which reinforces their shared life-styles, while counterbalanced by an awareness and acceptance of ethnic differences between them. Their agreements in *Pijin,* about the loose morality of other ethnic groups and of urbanites, also serves to heighten their similarity to each other. While I am not claiming that friendships with non-kin are a wholly new phenomenon, I am suggesting that (especially inter-ethnic) friendships in Honiara are a means of creating and consolidating class position through mutual interests, support and agreement. On the other hand, relationships with kin are given new (distancing) attributes when kin represent themselves—by virtue of earnings, spouse, education (and age)—to be members of different classes. Notably, when kin share similar levels of affluence and life-styles, then they operate in a similar way to friends. However, they do so without the need to negotiate ethnic differences between them. For example, they exchange small, non-monetary gifts when visiting informally.

In previous chapters, I discussed the importance of food in expressing convivial relations between middle class urbanites, but also in asserting differences in sophistication between them and their *lokol* relatives during formal household visits. Food exchange and eating are also central to informal visits between individuals: members of all ethnic groups use food as vehicle for expressing and reinforcing the nature of their relationships. Whether receiving friends or relatives, women always give plates of food to their guests, even if this means cooking up a fresh batch. Hosts never ask visitors whether they would like to eat, but merely put food in front of them. If their guest has brought a gift of food—such as yams or taro from *hom*, or *taiyo* from a store—then the host may prepare some of that, but not necessarily so. Guests never refuse food, but always eat something, even if they have just

consumed a full meal at their own house. However, it *is* acceptable for them to leave a little food on their plate, so long as they make visible effort to eat as much as possible. Honiarans consider it inappropriate and antisocial to reject food. Rejecting food acts as a rejection of the social relationship with the host; and by corollary, eating when visiting creates and reinforces ties between relatives and friends. However, it does not matter whether hosts and guests eat at the same time or not, what is important is that guests consume something when they visit a house. While some have argued that eating together creates kinship in certain contexts (Carsten, 1997; A. Strathern 1973), eating during informal visits appears to do something different for unrelated middle class Honiarans. The act itself is an expression of sociability, which is cross-cut by discourse surrounding different types of foodstuffs, according to whether they are *lokol* or connected to affluent urban life-styles. Through their choice of foodstuffs offered during visits, middle class urbanites use food to weaken ties of kinship while strengthening those between members of the same class (see Goody 1982; Becker 1995: 59; Gullestad 1984).

Food is one of the tools which many people, especially older women, use in their attempts to strengthen or rejuvenate their middle class relatives' links to home. This is particularly the case when these older women live at home and their younger relatives—especially daughters—live in town. In Chapter 1, I introduced the conflict between rural and urban food. By commenting on their daughters housekeeping and child-rearing practices, they make food iconic of the differences between *hom* and *taun* life. For example, they tell their daughters to feed their children "local food" (*lokol kaikai*) rather than store-bought food (often called "whiteman's food": *kaikai blo waetman*). *Lokol kaikai* has become the generic term for locally produced root crops, vegetables and fresh fish; whereas *kaikai blo waetman* means rice, *taiyo*, noodles, crackers and any other factory produced, refined or imported foodstuffs. However, while relatives who live rural life-styles valorise all *lokol kaikai* food as beneficial, they value food from their own *hom* as the best, often going to considerable lengths to obtain it for themselves and their relatives. This includes paying high prices at Honiara's market, or physically carrying sacks of garden produce to town. Many women who live at home complain about the quality of food available in town: blaming the quality of the soil or fishing areas and praising that of their own homes. For instance, women from Malaita tend to argue that Malaitan soil is much darker and therefore more fertile than that of Honiara and surrounding Guadalcanal, while women from Western Province sing the praises of the seafood from their own province's lagoons. Their relatives in town verbally agree with them, and are happy to receive gifts of food from home, but on a day-to-day basis prepare

store-bought food for their families and visitors, claiming that it is easier, and of a higher status.

Public health campaigns through schools, the media and the UNICEF-funded *Sup Sup Gaden* (*lit.* "soup garden") project have helped to promote garden produce and encourage this image of a generic *lokol kaikai* throughout the Solomon Islands. Despite this public valorisation of *lokol kaikai,* and the obvious bustle of town's fresh produce markets, pay-days still produce long queues at the checkouts of Honiara's grocery shops. There, the middle classes spend their wage cheques on imported foods to feed their families and visitors: meat for a special treat; and rice, *taiyo* and noodles as their staples. When women come from home to visit their middle class relatives, their relatives offer them store-bought food. They can deal with this in one of two ways: they either grumble, or are grateful. If they grumble, they say that store-bought food lacks nutritional, strength-giving properties. They imply that their daughters should prepare yam, taro, cassava, sweet potato and fresh fish and vegetables. Visitors tend only to feel grateful when they are offered very high-prestige items, meat in particular. Urban, middle class women are aware of their relatives' dislike for everyday store-bought food, but persist in giving it to them. The women say that they are townsfolk, so this is what they eat, and that they feed their visitors whatever is in the house. In this way, tension over food echoes tension between town and village people, and by feeding it to their relatives, women are making a statement about their separation from *lokol* life-styles.

On the other hand, friends support each other's ties to town and engagement in a multi-ethnic milieu by sharing their positive valorisation of store-bought food, and by their acceptance of the equality of foods from different homes. I also found that when urban friends sit down to chat, they often discuss cake recipes, where is the best place in town to buy flour at the moment, and compare the produce they have been sent from home. As well as their mutual satisfaction with store-bought food, middle class women tend to share views on *lokol kaikai* when they are together. This is not to say that they actively dislike *lokol kaikai*, nor that they think foods from all parts of the Solomon Islands are the same. In the company of a friend from a different ethnic group, a woman will take care not to judge *lokol kaikai* from her own *hom* as superior to that from her friend's.

For example, on one occasion, a woman's friend had given her yams from the 'Are'Are speaking area of Malaita. She stressed how tasty and "solid" (*strong*) they were, even though she herself was not from 'Are'Are, and she served the yams to any visitors. Her friends agreed with her evaluation of the yams, and compared them favourably to those from their own homes. The women were careful not to offend one another, and would not even

tease one another about the *lokol* food being much better at their own home. This is rather different to the judgements passed by visitors from home. In these instances, people will express strong preference for food from one area rather than another. In this way, middle class engagement with store-bought foods and *lokol* foods are centred on their consumption of the former, and consignment of the latter to a subject for discussion and only occasional consumption.

The operation of the *wantok* club showed how groups of urbanites use money to reconfigure relationships with kin. Such manipulations also occur between individuals, and there are marked differences in how urbanites use money with friends as opposed to kin. For instance, women say they dislike making cash loans to friends because tensions arise when the loan is not repaid. Only under exceptional circumstances would a Honiaran give money to a friend.[8] In this way, ties of binding long-term obligation are *partially* avoided with friends, who usually only make small, non-monetary exchanges of plant seeds, food and handicrafts. On the other hand, they can give money to a kin without expectation of a cash repayment: although the debt might be repaid in kind later because of the obligation it establishes. The meaning of money and things in such visiting exchanges is thus ambiguous, morally equivocal and problematic (Parry and Bloch 1989: 22, 25), and such exchanges are emblematic of the tensions and problematic of class formation. When Joyce gives some money to her mother, she is fully aware that Mary makes considerable sums of money at the market. However, Joyce still sees herself as better off than her mother and able to give her some cash, even though in reality she has trouble finding enough money every week to buy food for her children. Importantly, she is not only seeing herself as able to afford the gift, but also as wishing to represent herself to her mother as one who is able to afford it. In this way, while such gifts of money establish and acknowledge ties of obligation between mother and daughter, they also enhance a class barrier between them. Just as the presence of a video player in her house indicates Joyce's affluence and position to visitors, so does the generosity she displays to her mother, which she also shows to other kin, regardless of their age. However, this is not to say that these women completely cut themselves off from ties with home, more that they redefine these ties, and distance themselves from home.

Exchange of money, food, and gifts is only part of a wider picture of transactions that occur during visiting. Women are playing a game of status and prestige with regard to their relatives. While the mother displays what she thinks of as superior knowledge of home and *kastom*, her daughter counteracts this with her demonstration of her middle classness and

[8] For example, friends sometimes give small amounts of casino winnings to one another if they have been gambling at the same time. See Chapter 7.

knowledge of town protocol. From either perspective then, each of them has the upper hand. Both of them think they are superior to the other because they employ different value systems, the mother valorises that which is linked to home and *kastom*, the daughter valorises that which is linked to town and middle class ways. On the other hand, Esther and Kate do not do this with one another as their friendship is based on mutuality of their socio-economic class, which would be negated by one-upmanship. Women erect barriers of class between them and their kin, which are at odds with the unity of their ethnicity. On the other hand, they express commonality of class with their friends, which overrides ethnic differences.

Sexual morality is a theme through which people discuss ethnic differences, and compare home with town life. However, differences in perceptions about home versus town life further show the differences in opinions, which occur in friendships and kin relationships. Mary says that her niece has problems in town because there are many married men who are interested in her, which is because they follow neither Christianity nor *kastom* in town. As an affluent urbanite, Joyce agrees in part with her mother, but points out that the reason the niece left home in the first place was to escape the attentions of a married man. In this way, Joyce's mother valorises home as a moral space by referring to *kastom* and Christianity. Joyce disagrees by arguing that although *hom* is linked to *kastom*, infidelity and other moral breaches are not unknown there. Esther and Kate claim that people's ethnicity are rationale for their (immoral) behaviour, while downplaying their own ethnic differences. Contrary to Mary's assertion, the two friends say that people behave as they do in town *precisely* because they are behaving as they do at home. In this way then, Mary valorises home as a moral space; whereas her daughter and the two friends only valorise their own homes as moral spaces, but other's homes as immoral. Of course there is a generational difference here between mother and daughter, but other visitors from home also portray home as more moral than town. Middle class town dwellers rarely make similar assertions, but see problems in town as inextricably linked to increasing immorality at various homes. For them, the modernity of town incorporates many different ethnic ideals about morality, and although not all of these are ways in which they would choose to behave themselves, they understand and—to a degree—accept them as alternative modes of behaviour.

Fundamentally, middle class Honiarans justify their continued residence in town to their home-dwelling relatives, not as a choice to stay in an inherently immoral space, but as one that is not very different from home after all. While relationships between kin of different classes entail disagreement about the differences between home and town, those of friendship operate through mutual agreement. Therefore, what may be termed a common

middle class morality is not about sameness, but about an acknowledgement and acceptance of ethnic and religious differences within a milieu perceived as *moden.*

The discourses and practices of women's visits show some of the class-based tensions that occur between kin. Particularly, they show how women are redefining relationships with kin by using idioms of kinship to reinforce class difference and their distance from home. Friendships (and relationships with same-class kin) are based on common knowledge about the urban milieu which is cast in terms of an acceptance (although not necessarily approval) of differences. The movements which people make between houses is thus a flow of ideas and practices which aids the creation of middle class norms, which are influenced by, but somewhat at odds with, obligatory ties of kinship. What may be described as a common middle class morality is not necessarily based on sameness, or hybridity, but may centre on an acknowledgement—and occasional acceptance—of ethnic differences.

Men's visits

Men's visits are different to women's, usually taking place at weekends or in the evenings after work, and with different aims in mind. In some ways, however, men's visits echo those of women: they create and reinforce ties of friendship, while redefining relationships with kin. However, they obtain this end by different means. Unlike women, men usually retire to the veranda or television area to chat and drink with the men of the house. Meanwhile, women and girls belonging to the host household prepare them some food: usually rice, noodles, green vegetables, and *taiyo* or meat. Men, like women, never refuse food unless they intend to cause affront, as to do so rejects sociability with the host.

Men's informal gatherings are regular occasions at weekends and in the evenings, Honiara's verandas and shady areas provide space for men to congregate.[9] Although they feel less compelled to give specific reasons for their visits, in the same way as women justify their informal gatherings by saying they go to discuss sewing or crochet, many men say that they are going to visit to talk about something specific. Unlike women's visits, men's sometimes last long into the night. They may feel vaguely unsafe travelling home at night and will not do so on foot, but the connotations of sexual licence and availability do not apply to them as to women. Additionally, men do not feel the need to take someone else with them when they go visiting. This not only reflects women's roles as primary carers for children, but also the fact that men are not subjected to the same accusations of impropriety as women, and so do not need to restrict their movements to the same extent. This is not to

[9] Knauft discusses men's gatherings as opportunities for "collective male bonding" which replace male cults and houses (1997: 250).

say that women do not call into question their husbands' sexual probity if they are out after dark or on their own, and may chide their husbands, for returning late. However, people generally claim that the possibility of women's sexual licence as more deleterious to stable family life than that of men (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

I have explained how women's visits usually occur in the afternoon, and the only time that a woman will stay with visitors after night-fall is if her husband arrives to visit the men of the house while she is still there. When this happens, the couple either takes a taxi back to their house together, or use the husband's vehicle: neither men nor women see walking across town after dark as a safe alternative. Possession of a vehicle, or cash for relatively expensive taxi fares, allows for greater freedom of movement and longer visits than would otherwise be possible. In this way then, visits that either start or continue into the evening are mainly the preserve of the solvent middle classes and depend on men's control of transport.

Two examples illustrate the differences between relationships between kin and those between friends. First, I describe the interactions between two brothers: Matthew and Edward. I follow this with a discussion of a typical get-together of two friends, Paul and John, after a day's work. When relatives—for example, brothers—are living similar life-styles to one another as middle class urbanites, their interactions are more like friends or colleagues. However, their socialisation also tends to be underpinned by certain *kastom* norms, such as showing respect to an older sibling. While *kastom* proscriptions do play their part in Matthew and Edward's relationship, this is thrown out of balance by class differences.

Matthew and Edward: brothers

Matthew lives in a large house on the outskirts of Honiara. Men from Matthew's family often gather together on its veranda, particularly to discuss problems of land-claims related to logging on their home island. They usually meet in the evenings or weekends, when everyone has finished work. These meetings can take on formal airs, with set times and agendas for discussion, but usually they are informal and impromptu. While men are chatting, the women of the house provide peace, quiet and food. Occasionally, men arrive with their wives and children who spend the evening chatting among themselves, away from the men.

When men from one kin group gather together, it is normal for them to discuss issues concerned with rights and disputes. Among Matthew's kin, this is usually land and leadership. These kinds of conversations rarely refer to ethnic differences, and usually take place in *langguis* rather than *Pijin*. Although parents usher away very young children, they

sometimes encourage older boys to stay so that they learn to understand land and leadership issues. When discussing such concerns, unmarried and married men are all eligible to have their say, but older men usually dominate the talk: people say that they have more authority and knowledge. In addition, discussions and decisions are largely pragmatic. When discussing achieved leadership, men usually base their decisions on who would be the most appropriate to take a lead role in representing the family to officials and logging companies. Such leaders are not always the eldest, but are those are able to speak well (*man save tok*). These are people who have appropriate negotiating skills, especially those who can represent the interests of kin groups in the most persuasive form to external agencies, such as logging companies.[10] Within Matthew's (patrilineal and generally patriarchal) kin group, such discussions invariably exclude the opinions of women, whereas people from matrilineal groups may include women.[11]

Edward is one of Matthew's younger brothers who occasionally visits Honiara. Edward usually lives in Western Province, at his wife's home. In 1997, he came to town to consult archival sources to resolve a land dispute precipitated by the arrival of logging and mining companies at home. On this occasion he did not stay with Matthew, instead staying with relatives at the other side of town. For him and Matthew to chat means that one of them has to make a trip across town: usually in the evening, but sometimes at weekends. Edward says that he prefers coming to see Matthew at his own house as there is more space for them to sit and quietly talk. Although he is younger than Edward, Matthew gives him money, ostensibly to assist with his boat fare and living expenses while in town. According to *kastom*, the elder brother would provide assistance to the younger. The brothers have a close relationship based around their common concern with problems at home. Their conversations are almost entirely centred on home, including criticism of some urban relatives whom they feel should be more involved in the negotiations about land.

When Edward visits Matthew on his own, their talk often relates to Edward's activities during the day, and plans for subsequent days. For example, his work in the archives takes precedence as the two men codify genealogies and land-holdings. Crucially,

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[10] See Myers and Brenneis (1984) and Lindstrom (1990) for discussions of the importance of speaking abilities for Pacific leadership, wherein talk is seen as being efficacious in itself.

[11] For example, those from Santa Isabel practice matriliny and generally "chiefs" are male (White 1991*a*: 33-34, 56-72). People from Guadalcanal practice matrilineal descent and inheritance, and have both male and female "chiefs" (Hogbin 1965). In some areas, patrilineal (and formerly cognatic) systems of descent and inheritance are being altered in the face of land claims. For instance, in some areas, what were formerly cognatic systems of descent and inheritance are being replaced by assertions of patriliny as people try to codify genealogies for land claims.

men see such discussions as "work" rather than recreation, because they help to secure the financial well-being of themselves, their families, and their successors.

Paul and John: friends

Paul often visits his friend John after they have finished their day's work in the same government department. After work, they drive together to John's house and retire to the veranda on their own. Sometimes John's wife will sit with them for a short time, but always takes laundry off the washing line on the veranda when they arrive, and offers the men the chairs, shooing her children off them. Shortly though, she makes her excuses and leaves the two men while she goes and sees to her children and checks that the house-girl has started preparing the evening meal. John's oldest child, Matthew, stays with his father on the veranda for a while, but soon becomes bored with the men's chat and the lack of attention they give him and wanders off inside to play with his younger brother. Paul and John have brought a few bottles of beer with them, they laugh that they are drinking the regular "Solbrew" brand rather than the stronger "SB" or imported "VB", because they are short of money at the moment. Sometimes they chew betelnut too, but like many sophisticated urbanites, only do so occasionally, saying that they prefer the effect of beer.[12] While household bustle continues inside, the two men chat in *Pijin*, as John is from Central Province and Paul from Malaita and are not conversant in one another's *langguis*.

They discuss work, and the problems they face because of what they describe as the government's dire financial situation. Then they move on to discuss the forthcoming general election, particularly by talking about alleged cases of candidates bribing voters with promises of radios, canoes, outboard motors and development projects.[13] The house-girl brings them each a plate of food, piled much higher than the others and containing a large proportion of the meat from the cooking pot. She does not hand it directly to them, but places it in the table besides them, and explained to me that this avoids flouting *kastom* practices, which mean that she should not hand things directly to men. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, the women and children eat together, then move to the living room to watch videos.

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[12] Betelnut is often afforded importance as a generic *kastom* gift, although some Christian denominations prohibit its use (for example, the Seventh Day Adventist Church). Hirsch (1990) describes belelnut use among Fuyuge, Papua New Guinea, particularly the manner in which it has been adopted as a ritual object in place of chief's bones. Interestingly, many cosmopolitan Honiarans seldom chew betelnut, which they see as *lokol*. Their preference for other (imported) inebriating substances marks them out as different to their less affluent relatives. However, this disparity holds for those living in provincial centres too, where as income rises, expenditure on betelnut decreases while expenditure on beer increases (SISO 1995*b*: 49-50. Table 4.4.2).

[13] "Development" is often used as a catch all term for projects that aim to increase economic prosperity, rather than those which aim to enhance non-financial well-being, for example, health.

Later, an unmarried male cousin of John's wife arrives at the house carrying loaves of bread. He greets the men on the veranda, but does not sit with them, instead sitting with the women and children in the living room to watch videos and eat bread dipped in hot, malted milo drink. His choice of seat reflects his affiliation with the wife's side, and also his inferior position as a young boy rather than a married man. His greeting to the men is polite and respectfully brief, and he makes no attempt to join in their drinking session.

On the veranda the beer soon runs out, so John and Paul drive his government vehicle into town to buy some more. They return several hours later, after nightfall and when the children have already gone to bed. They sit and drink more on the veranda until finally John drives Paul back to his house and his anxious wife. Although it is not completely improper for men to be out after dark, this does not stop repercussions within their own households. Women fear that their husbands are out getting drunk and therefore wasting the household money and fraternising with girls at night-clubs. Because of such worries, Paul's wife telephoned John's house earlier in the evening to see if her husband was there: both Paul and John refused to come to the phone, and called out to John's wife to tell Paul's wife that he was there and would be home later. Men feel little compunction at their wives' telephone calls, but tend to shrug them off by refusing to talk to them themselves. By the time they return to their houses after such late-night drinking sessions, they often find their wives asleep, and do not discuss their wife's fears any further. However, as I discussed in Chapter 3, such late-night visits may elicit bouts of domestic violence, as husbands may beat their wives for chiding them about their late return to the house.

The work of men's visiting

In 1970s Port Moresby, Strathern's impression was that skilled workers made fewer inter-ethnic friendships than unskilled workers. She attributes this to the lack of career hierarchy within the unskilled workforce, which leads men to classify one another according to their ethnic origin and therefore have "greater impetus to override them" (1975: 261). In 1990s Honiara, the men whom I worked with seemed particularly adept at forming inter-ethnic friendships. Many attributed this to their ethnically plural education, which enabled them to obtain skilled employment in ethnically plural working environments. Also, within their hierarchical workplaces, ethnicity was a tacit key for promotion and progression through the *wantok sistem* ("wantok system"), although this brought serious controversy, which I discuss more fully in the next chapter.

Relationships between work colleagues begin as casual friendships, and have the potential to develop into close ones as time progresses. Also, there is not a always a sense

that ethnically-specific practices need to be altered or hybridised. Instead, ethnicity is often seen as a marker of difference, which can be discussed at times, is never forgotten, but is ideally kept to one side. In fact, most middle class men (and women) express a keenness to slowly develop enduring friendships with members of other ethnic groups, seeing this as *moden*, cosmopolitan and augmenting their separation from *hom.* Furthermore, affluent Honiarans generally do not describe their friends as *wantok*, and tend to reserve the term for ethnically based relationships that entail reciprocity, as I discussed Chapter 1.[14]

Paul and John are friends who are from different ethnic groups, but met through working together. Although they eat, drink and chat as relatives would, there are nuances in their behaviour which resonate with friendship rather than kinship. Usually, they call each other "friend" (*fren*), by each other's name, or by referring to their ethnicity or job. Their chat is different to that of relatives: it is always in *Pijin*, and they rarely discuss family issues with one other, preferring to tread the common ground of work and politics. Despite being close friends, they tend to lend each other video-cassettes and other small items, rather than money. Also, by buying beer, each tries to be as free with their cash as the other, saying that such social occasions warrant mutual generosity towards one another, the importance of which has also been described in Papua New Guinea (e.g. M. Smith 1994: 185).

Just as in the earlier visit between mother and daughter, Edward and Matthew meet as kin. Edward maintains closer links to home than Matthew, and is much less affluent than him. Although both are using town's facilities to further their land claims at home, they do so in different ways. Edward does not ask his younger brother to provide him with the money to come to town, but Matthew sees fit to provide him with sufficient for his stay. In addition, Matthew also offers Edward practical help, and shows him where and how to use the archive office where land records are stored. While Matthew offers money and knowledge of town officialdom, Edward contributes his time and effort: it is he who will convey information about the land case to people at home. It is relevant that Edward—not Matthew—is the one who moves between home and town to convey knowledge, while Matthew provides financial assistance. This resonates with Matthew's attempts to distance himself from home and establish himself as a sophisticated urbanite. The knowledge that he brings of home is about people's disputes about *kastom*, evidenced in the row about land ownership. The knowledge he takes from town to home is encoded written knowledge, of the kind found in colonial records. Also, he takes the cumulative knowledge of his relatives, which like the written

[14] However, on occasion, they may use the term *jokingly* to refer to friends from other ethnic groups, in order to express solidarity. However, incidences of such usage seem much less common than those described among unskilled migrants in Port Moresby by Levine and Levine (1979: 71), or Strathern (1975: 295).

records, attempts to codify knowledge about land ownership in a way deemed to be organised and patterned. Of course, his brothers also want to augment their own chances at claiming land for themselves. Matthew represents town views of *kastom* as infallible, and *kastom* from home as fallible: thus, he convinces Edward to come to town, gather knowledge of home, then return home bearing it. Although Edward is essentially a village dweller, Matthew offers him partial and temporary entry into the mobile middle class milieu by assisting his movements between home and town. In this way, when dealing with Edward, Matthew manipulates his knowledge and offers financial assistance to assert his superiority despite his relative youth.

Although articulating friendships and relationships with kin in different ways, men, like women, are manipulating both in order to enhance class solidarity as distinct from solidarity with kin. Their friendships with one another are seen as enduring, such that in the future they can call on friends for sociable chats and beer drinking.

Conclusions: households, individuals and visiting

Middle class urbanites rarely speak out against their relatives' attempts to keep them connected to *hom*, nor do they reject the commonality of their *kastom*. It is their actions that reject many of the ideals of homeness that their relatives seek to preserve. For example, I have shown how women continue to feed store-bought food to their children and visitors, despite their relatives' opposition. They also assert economic dominance by giving different class relatives gifts of money during visits, and justify their residence in town by disagreeing with their relatives about the morality of urbanites. Through such actions, affluent urbanites maintain relationships with their kin, but also assert their life-style and status difference, which is tantamount to creating a relationship of class. While such distinctions are often most salient when there is a generation difference, they also occur between kin of similar ages when some see themselves as engaged with affairs at home, and others with the urban world. While this does not imply that urbanites do not involve themselves in home life, they do so in such a way that their separation from it is reaffirmed. This is particularly marked in men's visits, when the town-dweller subtly asserts his superior knowledge over that of his rural brother. Friendship is based less on tension and more on commonality of experience. Friends from different ethnic backgrounds usually eat the same food as one another; exchange small gifts; and agree that any loose morality in town is connected to maintenance rather than loss of home life-styles. In their discussions, men friends focus less on sexual morality than women do, their concerns tend to centre on work and politics of land-

ownership and leadership. Such agreements serve to strengthen their belief in their social equivalence, counterbalanced by an awareness and acceptance of their ethnic differences.

This chapter has shown how stark separation between men and women takes place as soon as individuals rather than entire families become mobile in town. This is important, as this polarisation is not stifling, but affords great freedom to both men and women to be frank in their discussions of sensitive topics ranging from sexual morality to land disputes. The privacy and relative freedom of such contexts appears to enable urbanites to subtly push away their urban relatives with little fear of censure, and to be critical of behaviours that they claim are linked to ethnicity.

While I am not claiming that friendships with non-kin are a wholly new phenomenon, I would suggest that (especially inter-ethnic) friendships in Honiara are a means of creating and consolidating class position among a certain section of people. Affluent urbanites represent themselves as members of a middle class particularly by giving relationships with kin new, distancing forms. When kin *are* members of the same class, then they operate in a similar way to friends: although without the need to negotiate ethnic differences between them. Friendships (and relationships with same-class kin) are based on common knowledge about the urban milieu, which is cast in terms of an acceptance—although not necessarily approval—of differences. The movements that people make between houses become a flow of ideas and practices that help the formation of a new middle class ideology rooted in voluntary inter-ethnic friendships. Importantly, they cast these as running counter to obligatory ties of kinship.

Honiarans' attempts to downplay ethnic difference during formal visits, but willingness to discuss them in private, informal ones reflects their desire to avoid ruction or offence. While urbanites' distance from kin and home usually confers freedom to criticise others, when significant numbers of mixed sex kin, affines and friends are present, that freedom is curtailed, and people say that they do not "feel free" at such occasions. Urbanites' simultaneous deference to the sensitivities of rural relatives may be related to their awareness of the instability and vulnerability of town life, which was evidenced by the violence in Guadalcanal and Honiara during 1999.

In this section, I have addressed middle class Honiarans' attempts to create stable, linked households in town as well as individual friendships. In Section 3, I examine how urbanites interact with friends and colleagues when they are away from domestic settings, which helps to explain how they strive for freedom from the constraints of home, while acting in accordance with those constraints.

Section Three: Chapter 6

Working for selves and households: schools and churches

In this third and final section, I focus on concerns outside households. In this chapter, I describe middle class Honiarans' use of schools and churches as sites where they may achieve a degree of independence from the constraints of households and family ties. In the subsequent chapter, I address casinos and night-clubs, and show how they are arenas within which similar themes are played out. Throughout this section, I explain how Honiarans use these arenas to help them build strong inter-ethnic friendships, and develop weaker ties between colleagues. In Section 2, I discussed friendships as relationships within which ethnicity is discussed, but is not perceived as a barrier. Here I show how the same is true of relationships between colleagues. Because of affluent Honiarans' orientations towards each another, when ethnicity is implicated in cases of favouritism, then it is sometimes frowned upon as endangering an ideal of meritocracy. Furthermore, when obligations to home and extended families are broached, then they often conflict with everyday practices.

The spheres, which I describe in this section, are physically removed from household settings, and confer a degree of invisibility from the gaze of relatives and affines, providing Honiarans with more scope to "feel free". In such arenas, affluent Honiarans are orientated to the desires of individuals and their households, rather than those of wider kin networks and home. Paradoxically, this orientation does not mean that they totally disregard wider ties and the constraints of home and *kastom*. I discuss how Honiarans mould their behaviour in public settings according to these constraints, and explain how disagreement about the morality of certain practices indicates their ambivalence about the freedom of urban life-styles. In this way, while activities in these public arenas appear unconstrained, they are cross-cut by the demands and values of church and home, such that Honiarans' orientation towards individuals and households is partial.[1]

Furthermore, as in households, middle class sociality in these public arenas draws heavily on forms perceived to be foreign. In these chapters, I expand on some earlier themes, by showing that appropriation of foreign forms is on Solomon Islanders' own terms. In the words of Herzfeld: "the adoption of emblematically 'Western' clothes or other symbols of externally derived status ... does not mean passive acquiescence in the hegemony of this essentialized 'West'" (1995: 221). Not only is such appropriation achieved wholly in

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[1] While I am suggesting that Honiarans orientate themselves towards individual and household requirements, this is not intended as a discussion of changing constructions of personhood *per se*. It could be claimed that Honiarans are more like "individuals" than "dividuals" (see Strathern 1988), but the main thrust of my discussion does not take this line.

Solomon Island ways, but I also show how Honiarans' concern to become familiar with the foreign does not mean that they are only interested in the West. Instead, they take a more inclusive perspective. For example, I explain how they are as keen to understand what they describe as the *kastom* from countries on the global stage, and to travel to other Pacific Islands, as they are with the English language and undertake trips to Australia.

I conclude Section 3 with a brief discussion of whether practices in these spheres may usefully be considered as hybrid forms, or whether such (superficially hybrid) forms actually serve to conceal ongoing ethnic divisions, and are another form of "quietness". I also consider how Honiarans describe the manner of their ongoing acceptance of the values of home as subtle resistance, rather than as acquiescence to those values.

Work, play and the centrality of money

An important aspect of Honiarans' quotidian life is their attitudes to money, exchange and work. In particular, they clearly distinguish between "work" (*waka*) and "play" (*plei*), such that the former entails money-making activities and the latter is primarily associated with enjoyment. Honiarans also acknowledge that these two categories continually overlap and merge with one another. Concerns with money and exchange are themes that have arisen at several points throughout the thesis. For example, in Section 1, I showed how people must resolve the differences between forms of brideprice exchanges during negotiations about inter-ethnic marriages. In Section 2, I described the problems that householders' face when dealing with house-girls who are both kin and employees. I also explored how the operation of the *wantok klab*, and monetary gifts to kin during informal visits, serve to distance affluent Honiarans from their less wealthy relatives.

Wages from paid employment form the backbone of middle class households' income. Trompf makes a strong case for analysing Melanesian working practices as examples of "payback": work is not purely a matter of exchanging labour for cash, but combines social processes with those of the labour market. He argues that if a work situation does not entail "socializing ingredients" then Melanesians become uninterested. Therefore, an attractive work environment in Melanesia depends on the existence of fertile social relationships between employees as well as between employers and employees (1994: 407). Although certainly not solely a Melanesian phenomenon, Trompf's analysis goes some way to explaining the intensity of relationships between work-mates in Honiara, and the fact that they combine work and play at their workplaces. Furthermore, his argument sheds some light on the high rates of absenteeism in a milieu where social relationships and kinship obligations are as prized as wage-earning activities. Both employers and employees see it as

legitimate to be absent from work should kin or friendship obligations demand their attention. Such obligations include caring for those who are ill, seeing visitors off on their journeys home, and involvement in brideprice exchanges.

Of all the institutions with which Honiarans could engage, schools (*skul*) and churches (*sios*) are probably two of the most salient, with great importance in everyday living. In keeping with Trompf's assertions, as well as providing cash incomes, they are central loci for Honiarans' social lives and "play", as they are venues for the formation of social networks and notions of appropriate sociability. With this in mind, I focus on schools and churches as social workplaces, and discuss how peoples' management of their roles as employees and entrepreneurs highlights the tensions in their aspirations to middle class life-styles.

Strathern suggests that attitudes to money and work reveal much about orientation towards urban social networks, as well as future aspirations. In *No money on Our Skins* (1975), she examines how Hagen male migrants to Port Moresby foster an ethos of independence from relationships with kin at home while they live in town. They arrive in Port Moresby in the belief that they will return home, and usually do so. Their phrase, "no money on our skins" refers to the fact that they seldom return home with money as their rural kin would hope. As such, "no money on our skins" expresses migrants' sense of independence from home, which is founded their youth and involvement in urban life-styles. Although Strathern deals with temporary male migrants in 1970s Port Moresby, and I am discussing permanent urban families in 1990s Honiara, Honiarans also manage their financial situations carefully, with a view to obtaining independence from home. However, Honiarans' future aspirations entail a greater degree of distance from home than is the case among Hagen migrants, as they achieve stable households and relationships with members of different ethnic groups in town. In earlier chapters, I have suggested that their conspicuous generosity towards their rural kin, compared to the small-scale exchange between friends in town, paradoxically serves to distance urbanites from home and consolidate urban relationships. Despite the self-imposed nature of Honiarans' orientation away from home, and towards individuals and nuclear families in town, vocal debates about money show that their attitudes towards this shift are often enigmatic and ambivalent.

Although the core of most household incomes comes from regular employment, money obtained from different avenues is often crucial to households' well-being and maintenance of cosmopolitan life-styles. In this chapter, I describe how many urbanites run entrepreneurial schemes from their workplaces, and competing discourses emerge about the money earned in these ways. While some claim that such earnings are reasonable and

necessary, others say that they are immoral because they show that entrepreneurs privilege themselves and their nuclear families. Such disagreements highlight urbanites' ambivalence about the rise of discrete affluent households, which encapsulates the indeterminacy of modernity, although their actions ultimately do appear to "consolidate" rather than "challenge" that modernity (Gewertz and Errington 1996: 476).

The development of schools in the Solomon Islands

Although education is not compulsory, schooling is highly sought after by Solomon Islanders, and schools are important parts of most communities. National literacy rates are reputed to be relatively low compared to other Pacific countries, but many see education as desirable for their children, as it can be the key to well-paid employment. In 1995, 78% of boys aged between 5 and 14 years were enrolled at schools in the Solomon Islands, compared to 70% of girls. Proportions of children in Honiara who attended primary school were higher than these national averages (SISO 1996). Entrance to secondary school depends on examination results and ability to pay fees, and the proportion of girls enrolled at these schools declines as their ages increase. Honiara is home to 15 government and church run secondary schools, while 49 are scattered throughout the provinces. In addition, there are two privately run schools, which cater mainly for the children of expatriates, Solomon Islands Chinese, and the very wealthy elite. Higher education facilities are limited in Honiara, although the government runs the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), and the University of the South Pacific in Fiji operates an extension centre, which teaches to first year university level.

The initial development of schooling was based on mission activities, and only became a state enterprise in the mid-twentieth century. Once missions had established themselves in the Solomon Islands in the early twentieth century, they became keen to educate their congregations. In doing so, they not only taught reading, writing and arithmetic, but also inculcated their students with Christian faith, moral codes and ideals of sociability. For instance, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, missionaries in collusion with colonial administrators, encouraged islanders living in bush settlements to move into coastal villages centred around mission stations (Bennett 1987: 193). Many moved in order to use the facilities offered by the churches, notably the mission schools. These migrations are still within the living memory of some, and some people remember them alongside their grandparents' conversion to, or rejection of, Christianity. Thomas sums up the pervasive impact of Christianity in the Pacific, when he states that missions were concerned "to impose

a new temporal regime of work, leisure, celebration and worship; through education ... [they] offered a new global and local history" (1994: 140).

Until the end of World War II, the British Solomon Island Protectorate administration left education in the hands of the churches, but provided them with some subsidies. The state only became actively involved in providing education facilities in the 1950s. The first secondary school within the protectorate was King George VI School, which was opened by the state in an attempt to fill the gap left by the churches, as they only offered primary education. Secondary school teaching began at King George VI School in 1958, in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita. In 1966, the school was relocated to Honiara, where it has operated continuously ever since. During the 1950s, the government also made moves to open state primary schools, and to train Solomon Island teachers at a teacher training college, which opened in 1959. However, at independence in 1978, the postcolonial government inherited an education system that was still largely reliant on the churches. Since then, both state and church facilities have expanded dramatically to cope with a rapidly increasing youth population demanding education.

By the 1990s, the state system had overtaken the church in terms of the number of students attending their facilities. According to government statistics, in 1995 there were 69,281 students enrolled at state primary schools, compared to only 7,609 at church primary schools in the Solomon Islands (SISO 1996). Both state and church schools operate alongside one another: teachers implement a single state curriculum and examination system. Also, while church schools have a vested interest in inculcating Christian faith and values, state schools also include Christian religious instruction as part of their curricula. This is reflected in the government's inclusion of religious instruction in syllabi, and in general views that schools should stress Christian values in their classes.

Because of the relatively recent growth of state education in the Solomon Islands, most of my informants gained some or all of their education at church schools. These were mainly staffed by members of religious orders or missionaries, many of who were from overseas. Adults' memories of school days are varied. Many teachers say that they are careful not to re-enact the harsh discipline that they encountered while they were students, and rue the isolation from their families that they experienced while they were attending provincial schools. However, their negativity is usually coupled with an appreciation of their education, which enabled them to find well-paid and prestigious employment. Middle class Honiarans do value education as indicating a person's value and worth. For instance, educational attainment influences the amount of brideprice that parents will request for their daughter (see Chapter 2). Honiarans also value education for the employment opportunities that it

affords.[2] In addition, adults who attended secondary schools away from home say that they valued the opportunity to mix with students from all over the Solomon Islands. Those who went overseas to college or university—usually to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia or New Zealand—tend to be proudly nostalgic about the international connections they established while there.

Although teachers in the 1990s are actively involved in inculcating urban values and practices in the children, I do not focus exclusively on how this takes place. I approach schools as arenas for adults' social and work practices, rather than emphasising the role of schools in socialising children (cf. Stafford 1995). This is not say that children's experiences are unimportant. As Pettman (1984) has argued with regard to neighbouring Papua New Guinea, schools are key to children's socialisation as members of social classes. She claims that prior to the country's independence, state control of schools in Papua New Guinea served to inculcate students with the values and norms of colonial administrators. This ensured the development of a local elite who would not threaten the stability of the colony (1984: 135-136). After independence, schooling ensured that inequalities persisted, as, "parents do correctly perceive that one of the key functions of schools is to select people and allocate them to the upper level occupational hierarchy of the emerging capitalist economy" (1984: 138). I am aware of these facets of schooling, but because my fieldwork focused on the relationships between teachers, I am less concerned with their role in socialising students, than with their importance in concretising connections between adults.

Friends and colleagues

Honiara's schools are scattered throughout town, and generally find themselves oversubscribed by students. As in any country where both children and education are valued, town is often full of uniformed students and teachers going to and from school. Demand for education is so high that students face fierce competition for places, and individual classes often consist of more than forty students. Honiara's schools experience frequent staff shortages, despite many teachers' preference for working in urban schools rather than in isolated rural areas. Teachers say that they choose to work in town for several reasons. These include the fact that their spouses are based there in well-paid jobs in the public service, and their preference for a cosmopolitan milieu rather than isolated school campuses in the provinces. Although rural schools usually offer subsidised on-site housing to their staff,

[2] Note that this valorisation of education is by no means ubiquitous in Melanesia. For example, Carrier and Carrier (1989: 169-170) describe how Ponams afford no such esteem to educational attainment.

many teachers prefer to cope with expensive or run-down housing, and long, expensive bus journeys across town in order to stay in Honiara.

All schools operate under the authority of a head-teacher, and larger secondary schools also have departmental heads. Usually, head-teachers are men with some overseas training behind them. The operation of staff hierarchies varies greatly between schools, largely depending on the management style of head-teachers. Although head-teachers hold prestigious positions, this does not preclude criticism of them by members of staff. This may focus on anything from the day-to-day running and discipline of the school, to academic and employment issues. In particular, as I discuss below, some staff complain about the *wantok sistem* ("*wantok* system"), and may implicate prominent staff members in its operation.

Although teachers may criticise one another, relationships between staff are generally friendly and supportive. Teachers establish close-knit cliques, socialising together both within and outside school boundaries. As I mentioned in the previous section, schools are one of the main arenas where Honiarans formed friendships with members of other ethnic groups. However, whereas adults generally attended isolated boarding schools in the provinces, the growth of Honiara means that children, who stay in town for their education, are more likely to become friends by virtue of their parents' connections, rather than with class-mates.

During break-times, teachers—who are not otherwise busy—sit, smoke, eat, drink tea, and occasionally chew betelnut (see Chapter 5) while they gossip. Such informal gossip helps to establish friendships, and often centres on personal lives, rather than professional concerns. In staff-rooms and offices, teachers chat with each other about their problems with their relatives and spouses; discuss how many things they plan to take home as gifts at Christmas; and complain about the high cost of living in Honiara. It is difficult to generalise about the dynamics of staff-room chat, because it constantly changes as teachers come and go, or fall in and out of favour. In some schools, staff divide themselves along departmental lines, in others all socialise freely, and include head-teachers in their groups.

Activities such as staff-room gossip and "play" form the backbone for friendships between teachers, and help to enhance their sense of common interests. As well as gossiping with one another, after students have left school in the early afternoon, some teachers go into the town centre to visit a bank or go shopping. Others stay at school to mark and prepare assignments, as well as to socialise with one another. Although teaching, marking and preparation are often finished by early afternoon, regulations at most schools state that teachers should remain on the premises until 4 p.m. At one school, staff complained that they there was nothing available to keep them busy until that time, so the headmaster provided a

darts-board to amuse them. In a corridor where it was open to the breeze, the darts board provided an opportunity for "play", laughter and chat within the workplace (see plate 15).

Plate 15: Staff playing darts at school.

A ubiquitous aspect of staff-room dynamics is the fact that schools are one of the few places where men and women may mix with one another without fear of severe censure. Nonetheless, staff are careful to ensure that their relationships with colleagues are not misconstrued as sexual. Women, in particular, explain emphatically that any men at school are purely "work-mates" (*wakameit*), which is especially important when they describe the school environment to their husbands. Despite the relative acceptability of cross-sex sociability, if a man and a woman are left alone in the staff-room because everyone else has gone elsewhere, then it is rare for them to stay chatting to one another for more than a few minutes. This is because others might construe their proximity as indicating a sexual relationship between them. However, men and women happily sit and chat with each another in groups, and sometimes joke together about sex. While to some people this joking chat is improper, many say that it is acceptable because these opposite sex friends are neither their kin nor affines, therefore *kastom* prohibitions on discussing sex do not apply. Within households and other private contexts, many vehemently claim that mixed-sex groups joking about sex is "against *kastom*" (*agensim kastom*). The fact that teachers discuss sex is

strikingly peculiar to urban workplaces, and seems to encapsulate urbanites' distance from *kastom* proscriptions when in these contexts.

Appropriating the foreign

Although most middle class Honiarans are at pains to include foreign practices in their household activities, at schools such inclusion is even more salient. Of course, Solomon Islanders adopt and alter foreign influences according to their needs and backgrounds, but fundamentally do so in ways that reflect their concern to be cosmopolitan.[3] While teachers experienced an alienating system of education in their youth, their involvement with the schools of the 1990s embraces certain foreign ideals. In this way, the foreign norms to which they aspire are not necessarily those of the colonial and mission past. Rather than re-enacting the harsh discipline of their own school days—which was often based on the assumption that *kastom* was unimportant or incorrect—teachers' engage with one another, and with their students, rather differently. They mobilise constructions of the foreign which are *moden*, and are intertwined with values and practices that they perceive as particular to the Solomon Islands.

Schools merge foreign and Solomon Island practices in their attempts to inculcate national unity. As discussed by Jourdan (1995*a*), the government of the Solomon Islands is keen to emphasise national identity and establish a united citizenship. This emphasis enters into many aspects of schooling, including curriculum materials, daily flag raising ceremonies and memos and speeches extolling students to behave like the "leaders of tomorrow". This became a familiar sound in Honiara at the time of my fieldwork: the phrase entered into common parlance, official speeches, and media rhetoric. Inculcating national sentiment is largely the reserve of the elite, and I discuss the problems that it creates in greater depth in the thesis Conclusion.

Alongside promotion of Solomon Island nationhood, schools provide teachers and students with contact with more overtly foreign forms. This occurs in several ways, notably through use of English, certain curriculum materials, and involvement in global projects. The official language of education is English, competence in which indicates and reproduces speakers' and listeners' prestige, and as such constitutes "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1977: 179, 1991). However, in order to communicate effectively, many teachers and students use a mixture of English and *Pijin*, because of their limited knowledge of spoken English. Curriculum materials are increasingly produced by Solomon Islanders with the help of

[3] Appropriation of foreign forms and practices in this way has been well documented elsewhere. In particular, see Wilk (1995), and Rowlands (1994).

overseas aid donors, but a significant amount of written material entails descriptions of life abroad. For example, a secondary social studies textbook, entitled "Our Families", contains comparisons between British, Chinese and New Zealand "families". This is followed by a detailed description of Japanese family life, which students are asked to compare to life-styles in the Solomon Islands.[4] Such textbooks tend to promote images of foreigners as living in nuclear families, and not providing support to their older or less wealthy kin. The responses of staff and students to such portrayals are interesting, as they tend to express mild disapproval, while likening foreign life-styles to those of affluent Honiarans.

The involvement of staff in overseas projects affords more tangible global contacts. For instance, in 1997, UNESCO was promoting its Associated Schools Project (ASP) in the Pacific. The ASP required education authorities in Pacific countries to select schools to become members of the scheme. On joining the ASP, schools received UNESCO curriculum materials and special training for staff. At the school where I worked, many school staff were keen to become involved. In particular, teachers discussed with excitement the opportunities that the project presented for them to travel overseas to workshops as school representatives. Taking overseas trips affords considerable prestige to the travellers: both through their experiences of travelling and the gifts they bring back with them. In this way, teachers' excitement and willingness (often tempered by some apprehension) to become involved reflected their desire to achieve global connections, cosmopolitan life-styles, and obtain goods from overseas.

While limited use of the English language, foreign teaching materials, and involvement in the ASP scheme entails engagement with and understanding of life outside the Solomon Islands, schools are also settings for discussions about *kastom*, and the changes that curriculum planners believe it is undergoing. Because this is presented in the context of educational materials, both teachers and students gain knowledge of English terminology to describe *kastom* and kinship. Like newspapers and radio programmes, teachers often use terms such as "tradition", "tribe", "section" and "clan", which have entered into the everyday discourse of educated urbanites. As the young man's comment that, "it [my lack of knowledge of *kastom*] makes me feel like a part of me is missing", in Chapter 1 showed, discussions about the constitution of *kastom* are often coupled with regret about "changing" or "losing" *kastom.* Because the education system provides a lexicon for abstract analysis of such concepts, schools act as catalysts for urbanites' eloquent descriptions of social change and their move towards *moden* life-styles.

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[4] This book was designed and published by the Curriculum Development Centre, Honiara as a trial text. Despite having been listed as "trial" in the 1980s, it was still in use at Honiara's schools in 1997.

Staff also engage with foreign practices through the involvement of teachers from overseas. Despite policies that foster the training and employment of Solomon Islanders, many schools employ foreign teachers, some of whom make efforts to become accepted by their colleagues. For example, at one school, a Ghanaian teacher's mother died. She went home for the funeral, and after her return to the Solomon Islands, organised a feast for the staff at the school where she worked. She explained that it was her *kastom* to do so after a death, especially as her colleagues had provided her with so much sympathy and support. Unlike feasts arranged to bid farewell to staff (see below), she cooked and brought all the food herself, and made a point of preparing West African dishes. Her colleagues expressed interest in the food, asking about ingredients and cooking methods, which she described freely. The Solomon Islanders were sympathetic to her desire to hold a feast, and were glad that she felt able to adhere to what they described as "West African *kastom*" while in their country. Rather than making distinctions between her *kastom* and their own, they drew parallels between them, and discussed their knowledge of her *kastom* with relish. Understanding of foreign ways of life is in many ways a surrogate for international travel, as it also affords cosmopolitan standing. It is important here that Honiarans' attempts to become cosmopolitan are not purely a matter of becoming knowledgeable of, or competent in, Western modes of living, but also in those from elsewhere, including West Africa.

Workplace feasts: sociability and giving

The feast provided by the West African teacher lent relationships between staff an air of cohesion and commonality. All such events seem to add to the everyday practices that serve to build friendships. Schools hold frequent feasts, some of which are directly related to schools' educational roles, such as graduation ceremonies, and others that bid farewell to departing colleagues.

I have already discussed the centrality of food in Honiarans' sociability, although not in contexts of large-scale events, which Honiarans refer to as "feasts" (*fiis*). The role of formal feasts in Pacific sociality is well documented, as they play an important part in confirming ongoing group solidarity. Becker makes the case well with regard to Fijian feasting practices: "Food is, of course, perishable; what endures is the capacity to mobilise and regenerate the social relationships that supply the goods" (1995: 65). However, this is not to say that all types of feast carry the same connotations, as some may be antagonistic, and others convivial.[5] Feasts held at schools are largely convivial, as speeches and pre-event

[5] See Young (1971: 195), and M. Kahn (1986: 147-148).

discussions often explicitly mention how they promote unity and sociability, notably between staff. However, like smaller events held at houses, these feasts also connote a division—or subtle antagonism—between those who take part in them, and those who are excluded because they do not have jobs within those institutions. While in this way, such events do mimic those held by kin groups and households, their content is different. They create unity within a milieu based on inter-ethnic relationships.

School feasts generally involve preparation by everyone. Teachers bring dishes of food with them, while school funds provide plates, cups, cutlery and soft drinks. Women cook and bring along food in covered pots or plastic containers, men usually bring food that they have bought, or that their wives, mothers or sisters have made. Like the food prepared by the West African teacher, the food occasionally reflects ethnicity and may be the subject of brief discussion. Generally though, staff bring dishes which they say are generic to the Solomon Islands, and to Honiara in particular, such that chicken curry and barbecued fish are favourites. In this way, food expresses and reinforces their status as urbanites who are capable of implementing behaviour that does not emphasise ethnicity.

Plate 16: Presenting gifts to departing student-teachers at school.

Gifts form a central part of such feasts. When teachers or student-teachers leave a school for good, or for education overseas, then the staff join forces to buy and present them with gifts (see plate 16). Those who are leaving reciprocate immediately with return gifts. In

this way, gift exchange is not the generalised reciprocity expected within kin groups, but is the immediate, balanced reciprocity of looser, shorter-term ties (Sahlins 1974). The conviviality of feasts and gift exchange reaffirms friendly relationships between teachers which emerge during staff room gossip and play, but not all colleagues become "friends". Through their immediate reciprocation of gifts, many colleagues reaffirm attenuated forms of friendships, and avoid longer-term ties of obligation with one another. However, the existence of this immediate, balanced reciprocity does not preclude the creation of a certain form of ties between colleagues. These do exist and are moral, but do not entail certain rights that are confined to longer-term ties of friendship, or the even more resilient ties of kinship. For example, a teacher cannot expect a colleague to care for their children, or to provide substantial, long-term financial assistance. Unlike those between rural and urban kin, ties between colleagues do not rest on an inequality between their individual life-styles, but instead assume similar aspirations and values. For instance, colleagues all hope that their children will obtain good education and therefore well-paid, prestigious jobs; they usually plan to own or borrow a video-player; and they view home as a distant memory and point of origin, rather than an ever-present guide for action.

Further, gift exchange between colleagues at feasts appears to be an expression of an ideal of the interested gift: giving *does* entail the expectation of return. This runs counter to presentations made by these urbanites to their kin at home, through which urbanites can express and reconfirm their relative success in town by not expecting gifts in return. For example, in Chapter 4, I described how parents tell their children not to expect a birthday gift from the unintentional guest from home. Gift exchange between colleagues, who are not necessarily close friends, is a form of that between friends, which I described in Chapter 5.

The types of items presented at school feasts are important in themselves, as they connote teachers' perceptions of the school and of their relationships with one another. Recipients usually do not unwrap and reveal the content of gift packages as soon as they receive them. However, on occasion, givers implore them to do so, especially if the item has particular significance. For example, at his farewell feast, a departing teacher presented his colleagues with a gift, in return for those he had received. He encouraged the headmaster to open it at once, in front of the gathered staff and students. When the headmaster found that the gift was a wall-clock, the giver explained that he had noticed it was something that the school lacked. Everyone took his thinly veiled reference to teachers' lax attitude to time keeping with humour, not least because its accuracy rendered the gift and accompanying comment all the more witty.

Plate 17: Buying gifts at Acor. Acor Store is at Point Cruz, where it sells goods including clothes, toys and cooking utensils. Honiarans say that it is their favourite shop to buy gifts, because it is cheap and sells everything they need. Staff at Acor even provide a gift-wrapping service for their sets of glasses and bowls. Their advertising slogan sums up most people's views of the shop: "Acor: the store with so much more."

Many teachers describe their gifts to relatives at home as so lavish that reciprocation would be impossible, because of the costs involved. They also see them as useful to their kin: they explain that their gifts of goods and money serve to supplement rural household expenditure. On the other hand, they exchange more frivolous gifts with their friends and colleagues in town, as expressions and reinforcement of their financial and social equality. For example, in Chapter 5, I described how women, who visit one another at their houses, exchange flower seeds and food stuffs such as yams, which they would be unlikely to otherwise buy. Despite its apparent use value, the clock falls within this remit, because it the school staff would not have considered it worthwhile to buy for themselves. More usually, people give sets of glasses or bowls bought from Acor store at Point Cruz (see plate 17). While such items clearly have utility, they are presented and received as luxury items, and are not intended to replace or supplement household expenditure.

Considering the reliance of middle class households on work or small enterprise earnings compared to the subsistence activities of their less affluent relatives, disinterested giving from urban to rural kin is in keeping with a separation of work from household economies as argued by Carrier (1995*a*: 153). His assertion is a development of Parry's

argument that greater division of labour in society is connected to the emergence of an ideology of a "pure gift" (1986: 467). This ideology of disinterested giving operates alongside that between colleagues in which there is clear expectation of return. However, by giving frivolous or luxury items, rather than staple goods, to one another, middle class urbanites can express and reconfirm the self-reliance of themselves and their households.

Like gifts given to individual teachers, gifts received by schools—for example, posters and books—often find their ways to the houses of staff. Few say that this is problematic, and explain that they use such items for house decoration and to educate their own children. However, this is not to say that teachers see their acquisition of such items as entirely proper. Items are not taken away from school openly. Like the televisions owned by the government, which grace many middle class houses throughout town, such items are hidden and provide sources of humour. Such secrecy confirms the tension between personal accumulation and notions of general good that Honiarans are negotiating. I discuss this in greater depth below.

Problems in relationships between colleagues: the *wantok* system and money-making schemes

While chat, play, feasts and gift exchange at schools tend to reconfirm harmonious relationships between teachers, money and employment may provoke conflict and a certain amount of anomie. In particular, the *wantok sistem* ("wantok system"), and teachers' attempts to raise money from small enterprise, elicit debate and dissatisfaction.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the *wantok* system as an ethos of mutual support between members of an ethnic group. Because such support often means that people offer or receive employment from their *wantok*, discussions about its processes are prevalent in workplaces. In Chapter 4, I described the dual affects of the *wantok klab* ("*wantok* club"), as urbanites established it to help rural relatives, but through it assert their distance from them. Members and beneficiaries describe the operation of the *wantok* club as an appropriate mobilisation of *wantok* ties, whereas the *wantok* system provokes rather more ambivalent evaluations. Affluent urbanites use the system for their own advancement, but simultaneously complain that it is in some ways immoral.

Some teachers pointed out that some schools had a high proportion of staff members from the same ethnic group as those involved in selection processes. They complained that their own relatives had been unable to find employment at certain workplaces, claiming that this was because they were excluded due to their ethnicity. They said that many employers favoured members of their own ethnic groups for jobs, because of the prevalence of the

wantok system. Such complaints were generally kept relatively quiet, and those who were disgruntled would never directly confront an employer with accusations of unfairness. Honiarans more often discussed the *wantok* system in abstract terms, only pointing to specific cases when in private. In the mixed-ethnicity contexts of workplaces, they said that naming certain persons or groups would only serve to cause affront.

The fact that Honiarans felt the need to discuss the *wantok* system in abstract terms when at work underlines their view that frank discussions of it could be construed as accusatory. Many teachers—at all levels—admitted distaste for the *wantok* system, complaining that it was not to their benefit, and that institutions such as schools should adopt a meritocracy in the manner of "modern" places. This dissatisfaction was based on awareness of the use of ethnicity in strategic power plays, and by corollary, the powerlessness that it could provoke. However, this did not necessarily lead them to radically downplay their own ethic affiliation, rather, they complained that ethnicity should be acknowledged but ignored in processes of selection.

The *wantok* system is an example of the dialectic between means of social advancement that are seen as *kastom*, and those viewed as *moden*. Most Honiarans are unsure of whether to classify the *wantok* system as a property of *kastom* life-styles or not. They claim that although based on *kastom* obligations, it has only flourished because of urban institutions: notably workplaces. Whereas many argue that privileging kin and ethnic connections is the mark of a generous and good person, they say that this is inappropriate in a work setting. In this way, they identify a conflict between *moden* workplaces, which they say should be based on meritocracy, and *kastom* support networks based on legitimate favouritism. The ethnic pluralism of town leads to disaffection with others' employment of this *kastom* morality. However, at the same time, many Honiarans express self-interest and competition. Despite their vocal opposition to the *wantok* system, most people are willing to use it for their own ends: in order to obtain benefits from *wantok,* as well as to help fellow *wantok* when in positions to do so (with the hope of future reciprocation). Urbanites see it as morally improper for one of their competitors to receive assistance from a *wantok*, but as thoroughly proper to provide or receive help themselves. In this way, interpretations of the decency of the *wantok* system are indeterminate, and indicate the tension between tacit self-interest and vocalised expressions of the general good.

Through their provision of employment, schools are central to teachers' financial well-being, and this is one of the reasons why the *wantok* system is a contentious and emotive topic. Although most teachers add their wages to those of a spouse or parent to support their households, it is not uncommon for a teacher's wage to be the sole regular

source of income for a household. Patterns of redistribution and obligation tend to follow similar patterns for all middle class urbanites. Unmarried wage-workers redistribute their earnings to the kin whom they live with, in order to pay for everyday expenses as well as larger one-off payments such as school fees and brideprice. On marriage and establishment of separate households, most of their earnings go into the new household coffers. Many teachers enjoy their work, and do describe their jobs in these terms, but most emphasise their salaries when discussing their positions and the prestige that they obtain from them. This is unsurprising, given that money is necessary to maintain the life-styles to which they aspire, yet salaries are barely in keeping with the cost of living, especially in Honiara where food and fuel must be purchased rather than harvested.[6] Like the items exchanged as gifts at feasts, money accrued from small enterprise schemes at school adds to the comfort of individuals and nuclear families. However, similar to the ambivalence suggested by the secrecy that surrounds items taken to teachers' houses, there is a tension between staff's desires to accumulate in order to increase the luxury of their households and their acknowledgement that this behaviour is somewhat suspect and "selfish".

Affluent Honiarans rarely depend on paid employment as their sole source of prestige or income. To obtain extra money, as well as the gambling that I discuss in Chapter 7, most people run small-scale enterprises alongside their jobs. Some buy bales of second-hand clothing to split up and sell as individual garments; others run market gardens or small stores from their houses; and some rear chickens for slaughter and sale. At Honiara's schools, teachers make food to sell to each other and to their students. In part, this reflects real financial need, but also highlights changing attitudes to money, which privilege acquisition by individuals and their immediate families over obligations to wider kin groups. This is becoming increasingly widespread, but is nonetheless problematic, and often is only tacitly accepted. Discourse about money-making schemes illustrates some of the moral dilemmas that this invokes.

Some school head-teachers allow their staff to sell snack foods during break-times. Usually, foodstuffs include sandwiches, pieces of cake, and the ever popular chocolate-coated bananas. Some teachers do this alone, while others team up in groups of two or three. Working as groups is useful; if one member of a group needs to be away from school during break-time, then the others can sell the prepared food on their behalf, and split the takings

[6] For example, throughout 1997, a primary school teacher's take home pay stayed at roughly SI$500 per month, while a 20kg bag of rice rose from SI$42 to SI$55 during that year. In some households, a 20kg bag of rice lasted only one week.

between all of them. Those who sell food can make sizeable income, as much as doubling their salaries from their regular jobs.

Although head-teachers consult with their staff before allowing such enterprise, conflict may arise when people see these business enterprises as bringing too much money to the sellers. Although some small business operators—especially in rural areas—find themselves the subjects of jealousy and associated magic, jealousy is not the motivating factor for tensions over food selling at school. Instead, some argue that because the selling happens within school boundaries, and is often very successful, then some cash should go to school funds as well as to the sellers. When one school administration allowed teachers to prepare and sell food at the school canteen, some said that staff were making too much money out of it. At a staff meeting on the subject, a primary school teacher—Helen—argued that staff should be permitted to earn extra money for food, bus fares and basic items for their houses, but that acquisition above and beyond the costs of these needs *luk nogud* ("looked incorrect").[7] Many other teachers nodded in agreement. For them, people earning money this way was not wrong *per se,* but what they did with the money was problematic. While generating enough money to buy food, bus fares and household items was acceptable, sellers were clearly making an amount of money exceeding the costs of these needs, which Helen and her supporters claimed was overly acquisitive and therefore inappropriate. This argument was widespread in Honiara, as urbanites frequently criticised those involved in small businesses or market selling in addition to their regular employment. While all such criticisms focused on entrepreneurship, teachers expressed their complaints about food selling at school by focusing on the end product—the money—rather than the activity itself.[8]

Helen's opposition was a moral argument that money earned from small enterprises should only provide for basic, quotidian needs. She said that any excess should not go into the entrepreneurs' hands, but into those of the school to pay for its basic needs, such as books and building work. In this way, Helen and her supporters classified money earned from wages as different to that earned from small enterprise. They argued that the former was legitimate as it paid for basic family needs, but the latter went above and beyond those requirements, and as such money earned this way should not go into the coffers of individual families. On no occasion did the teachers cite the school environment as a factor in their argument. To them the school was just another workplace, which did not entail a moral

[7] *Luk nogud* is used in several ways, depending on context: it may also be used to either mean that something is so excessive that it looks unpleasant, or that something is so good that it looks excellent.
[8] On other occasions, Honiarans criticise the activity of making money, not just the end product. For instance, some claim that women should be at their houses looking after children rather than selling produce at market stalls.

requirement not to engage into business transactions with students, nor did they claim that the students deserved some of the income. In this way, teachers did not relate their arguments to the schools' and teachers' places as carers and providers of values and moral guidance for children. Their assertions centred on denying accumulation by individual teachers and their households. Issues of giving and keeping are central here. Teachers' decisions to privilege their personal and immediate families' desires for luxury goods were widespread but shameful, although providing for necessities was acceptable. Honiarans generally describe luxuries as vehicles, videos, certain store-bought foods (such as biscuits), new clothing and household decorations. It is significant that all of these items augment the comfort of individuals and their immediate families. As such, opposition to acquisition of these may be read as opposition to an orientation towards urban family structures.

Helen's response to food-sellers' acquisitiveness can be seen as based on her awareness and disapproval of individuals' desire to achieve luxury life-styles for their households. She explicitly linked workplace economies to the needs of households, disapproving of her colleagues' desire to channel money into acquisitive avenues, and claimed that these high levels of individualism and preference for nuclear families were improper. The fact that people *were* engaged in selling food at school highlights that some believed that money earned in any way should mainly benefit their own households. On the other hand, Helen argued that once their basic needs were fulfilled, then those of the school should come into play. Because she did not want food-sellers to earn money, it could be argued that she claimed that school replaces the extended kin-network as a surrogate family. However, given the institutional and foreign nature of schools as discussed above, it seems more plausible that she did not see family and school as interchangeable or equivalent to one another. Honiarans make a clear distinction between households and institutions such as schools. Schools are discrete networks of staff and students, but through their use of English, certain curriculum materials and involvement in global projects, they represent wider society, which encompasses government, church and global connections.

Reactions such as those of Helen and her supporters go some way to explaining why some school staff try to hold fund-raising events that are targeted to benefit the schools themselves. On the other hand, the actions of the teachers who were interested in making and keeping cash from selling food goes some way to explaining why these events are not always popular, and why parents and staff are often not involved in them, despite repeated requests by head-teachers and organisers. Many staff and parents do not want to spend their time making food or expending energy working for events, which benefit the school rather than themselves. The same applies to some schools' cleaning routines, which staff and parents are

supposed to perform on occasional weekends. Staff and parents complain that they are already too busy at their houses to become involved, for example, they exclaim: "I am too busy looking after the children to go!" Because of this, schools' attempts to obtain funds, and to encourage community involvement by using their labour, often fail. Staff and students neither receive any financial recompense, nor much recognition for their effort, and so are reluctant to participate. Only the most motivating head-teachers manage to achieve successful fund-raising events or cleaning rotas, not least because this reflects their prowess as leaders, and therefore indicates that the participants are mere followers.

I have explained how privileging households does not preclude sending remittances home, either by request or impromptu payments, and how urbanites also make a point of taking extravagant non-monetary gifts with them on their visits home, such as sacks of rice and cartons of *taiyo*. Most urbanites are coy about describing how much money they keep for their immediate families, but make much of their generosity to relatives at home. Giving money and gifts to relatives at home confers prestige on the giver and brings real financial benefit to the recipients: as such, although given without the expectation of financial return, these gifts are not completely "free and unconstrained" (Parry 1986). On the other hand, urbanites feel rather ashamed of their strong desire to retain money and expensive items for themselves and their immediate families, and are secretive about such accumulation. They can be similarly ashamed about their reluctance to join in with fund-raising events, but are more open about the fact that they avoid them because of family obligations. Although nuclear family arrangements are becoming important in town, urbanites' attitudes towards privileging them shows their ambivalence towards this self-made change. The growth of wage-labour and opportunities for entrepreneurial schemes distances kin-based household economies from those of work, especially because of the valorisation of well paid careers as vehicles for obtaining prestige. In this way, middle class Honiarans are starting to differentiate between household and wage economies.[9]

Schools offer opportunities for increasing individual gain and class cohesion, but entail ambivalence and tension. First, the practices of teachers in schools indicate their attempts to learn about and accept foreign practices. Second, teachers achieve close inter-ethnic friendships and harmonious relationships, and express concern about the *wantok* system. These show how teachers desire to accept and annihilate ethnic difference, but simultaneously make use of ethnicity as a resource for self-advancement. Third, many

[9] Although, of course, I do not mean to imply that the situation in Honiara echoes a past century in Europe, this differentiation seems akin to that described by Carrier (1995*a*: 153-156) as taking place among members of the middle class in the West during the nineteenth century.

teachers hope to accumulate wealth for themselves and households, but are criticised by colleagues for doing so. In the final part of this chapter, I discuss how churches are similar to schools, as they also provide avenues for their employees—notably their (lay) leaders—to accumulate money and prestige. However, because church leaders are not embroiled in networks of peers, and are engaged with institutions that Honiarans perceive as intrinsically moral, they are able to engage in self-enhancement and accumulation with little fear of censure.

Middle class involvement with churches

In the thesis Introduction, I briefly outlined the historical development of missions and churches throughout the Solomon Islands. In the 1990s, the vast majority of the population claimed membership of a Christian church, and members of different denominations generally coexisted harmoniously. Christian values have massive importance in the everyday lives of Solomon Islanders, and are often viewed as complementary to, or intertwined with, those of *kastom*, such that Christianity is part and parcel of Solomon Islandness. Toren describes a similar situation in Fiji: "Once Christian ritual 'belonged' to the colonising power and its legitimating authority, the church. Today, Fijians have made it their own" (1988: 715). However, such intertwining and appropriation is only selectively employed, such that sometimes people describe *kastom* as opposed to Christianity. For instance, I have already described how some see *kastom* marriages as contradicting church constructions of marriage. Christianity pervades family life and values, housing patterns, and many aspects of morality, but here I focus on how Honiarans use churches as resources, whether through their rejection or acceptance of church activities and values.[10]

While the wide range of denominations makes it hard to generalise about the roles of churches in Honiara, many people engage in them in similar ways, regardless of denomination. In particular, some Honiarans reject involvement in church activities, and such attitudes highlight urbanites' move away from the values of home and *kastom*, which are often associated with church. For those who do become involved in church activities and groups, churches form social arenas within which they may achieve prestige. Aspiring members of the middle class use churches as employers, and as settings within which they affirm their orientation towards households and themselves.

[10] See Burt 1994, for a thorough description of the development of the SSEC church in Kwara'ae speaking areas of Malaita. See Laracy (1976), and Tippett (1967) for discussions of the development of the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity in the Solomon Islands respectively.

Plate 18: Holy Cross Roman Catholic Cathedral.

There are several large cathedrals and numerous smaller parish churches in Honiara (see plate 18). Attending any church service takes up several hours on a Saturday or Sunday. Many small family or household groups go together, but because not all households consist of members of the same denomination, some households split up in order to attend different churches. Although early patterns of mission activity meant that ethnicity and denomination became closely linked, any tensions about ethnicity rarely coincide with tensions about denomination. This is largely because most people are tolerant of different Christian faiths, and emphasise the fact that they are based on a unitary notion of God.

Many Honiarans go to church once a week. When at weekend services, women and girls usually sit together with the young children on one side of the centre aisle, while men and older boys sit on the other. At very busy services, women and girls tend to sit at the back of church buildings, sometimes on the floor. There they can feed biscuits or other snacks to the children in their care, which helps to keep them relatively quiet during long services. Such gender segregation is generally not the result of demands by present-day clergy, administrators, or church regulations. Honiarans say that it reflects the gender segregation of missionary churches, which melded well with that of pre-missionisation *kastom* segregation and hierarchy. However, while segregation is the norm, some families (husband, wife and children) do sit together as groups in their own right. Like the family eating patterns, which I

described in Chapter 3, this tends to reflect relatively happy marriages, and also the valorisation of the nuclear family as a unit. As such, this pattern is usually the reserve of middle class families, although this is neither exclusively the case, nor rigid.

Christianity pervades most of Solomon Islanders' lives, but some urbanites neither attend church services regularly, nor are involved in church activities. Also, some reject the churches' moral rhetoric, and knowingly fail to adhere to church proscriptions. For example, despite church dogma, not all members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA)avoid alcohol: joking that they are "backsliders" (*baekslaed*). Many churches encourage their members to adhere to the Sabbath as a day of rest, but people's interpretations of this are fluid, and not without humour. For instance, on several occasions, a woman who belonged to the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC), whose members observe a Sunday Sabbath of rest, explained that she had spent Saturday resting, and so would spend Sunday working in her garden. She laughed that this meant she had already fulfilled her Sabbath observance, and so Sunday would be a normal weekday for her. In this way, claims to church membership do not necessarily equate with a total acceptance of church guidelines for everyday living, which are interpreted with fluidity.

Those who do not go to church give a variety of reasons for their behaviour. Some juxtapose *kastom* and Christian values. For instance, some couples who are *kastom* married say that they do not feel "worthy" enough to attend (see Chapter 2). Others cite pragmatic concerns, by explaining that they are too busy with their work or child-care. A few say that the church and all it represents holds little meaning for them anymore. While some members of all denominations and classes in Honiara do not attend church, this practice seems more widespread among affluent Honiarans, and is rare among people living in rural areas. However, regardless of their justifications for non-attendance in town, nearly all urbanites *do* go to church when they visit home. They say that not going would show disrespect for their rural relatives and affines, whereas in town showing respect for kin and affines is not paramount: either because they are not present, or because the size of the milieu confers a certain degree of unobservability. In this way, while affluent urbanites strive to distance themselves from the demands of kin at home, they set limits on how far they feel able to take this. They claim that they should nonetheless show respect for rural relatives and their strong adherence to Christianity, and failing to attend church at home would be very disrespectful.

Most people's rejection of certain of church proscriptions, or their non-attendance at services does not mean their total rejection of Christianity as a moral basis for actions. However, justifications for their withdrawal from active participation tend to correspond with other changes in their social positions and practices. While occasionally contrasting

kastom with Christianity, members of the middle class more often argue that both systems entail similar values of respect. This reflects a process whereby church is no longer seen as imported and foreign, but is viewed as part of "true" (*tru*) Solomon Island life. Conversely, highland Malaitans are no longer the only "heathens" (*hiden*) with whom Solomon Islanders must engage, but those abroad—including in former missionising countries—also constitute a moral threat. Because of the perceived connections between *kastom* and church, a conscious distancing from church affairs (although not necessarily claims to faith) often corresponds with a distancing from *kastom* practices.

Although decisions to avoid involvement in church activities are not confined to middle class urbanites, both Honiarans and people living in the provinces say that such lack of adherence is more widespread in *taun* than at *hom*. Rural people say that this is further confirmation of the moral impropriety of urbanites. Urbanites claim that they are better educated and more able to make their own decisions on such matters than their rural relatives. Hence, they say that they feel it is their own choice, rather than a foregone conclusion that they adhere to church (and *kastom*) proscriptions relating to everyday behaviour. For them, this is an element of their freedom in town. Although the church is salient in all aspects of everyday life, affluent urbanites reinterpret its demands to suit their "modern" life-styles. Many use it as a resource and feel less compelled to fill their time with religious activities than with the casinos and night-clubs, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Using church as a resource: church leaders

Some middle class Honiarans participate in church activities through church groups, such as the Anglican Mothers' Union, and the United Church Fellowship groups. Gewertz and Errington (1996) describe how Antioch, a Roman Catholic youth group in Wewak, acted as a focus for concerns about the interplay between "tradition" and "modernity", which led to tradition being viewed as, "not necessarily compelling in and of its particulars, but was instead defined as a matter of personal ... choice and appreciation" (1996: 490). I have described how urbanites discuss their attendance at church similarly as a matter of personal choice. Involvement in Honiara's church groups raises similar concerns to Antioch. In particular, adults' involvement in church groups as lay leaders enables them to orientate themselves towards themselves and their households, and hence manipulate their own self-creation and partial rejection of *kastom* and home. Paradoxically then, church emphasis on nuclear family structures actually augments Honiarans' shift away from the church, *kastom* and home.

In addition to their overtly religious elements such as prayer meetings, church groups offer opportunities for community action. For example, members of women's groups not only involve themselves in preparation of services and proselytising to highland Malaitan "heathens" (*hiden*), but also focus on homemaking skills and community services. Christian undertones centre on moulding good, charitable participants within the "community" and marriage, which implicitly downplays the importance of wider kinship networks. In Chapter 2, I mentioned church counselling services for married couples; and in Chapter 3, I discussed a church leader's assertion that well-decorated houses provide stable environments for marriages.[11] Much church rhetoric centres on the claim that married couples with children form the most satisfactory basis for a good and stable society. In addition, leaders of church groups try to encourage their members to act charitably to non-kin within the "community", for example, by visiting hospital patients.

Middle class people either tend to become fully committed and involved in these groups and activities, or remain completely outside them. Those who want to become involved usually only do so if there is the opportunity for them to occupy high status positions as paid employees of the church, for instance, as co-ordinators or secretaries of church groups. Honiarans who do not participate generally have varied reasons for not doing so, which may include feelings of "unworthiness" or a lack of respect from, and therefore for, the organisers of the groups. Several women complained that their attempts to join groups had failed when they did not feel welcomed or respected by other group members. Some explained that this was because members made negative moral judgements about them, and others claimed that their attempts to work in leadership roles were blocked by conflict with existing leaders who wanted to retain control of the groups.

Although each church has its own organisational structure, most people who do secure official leadership jobs have offices on church premises, and are vocal in both individual church and ecumenical meetings. Men and women display and enhance their prestige within the community as a whole by their involvement. In particular, by acting as highly visible spokespersons and organisers, they are afforded respect from members of other denominations as well as their own. While clergy and leaders usually select new leaders who are already prestigious within the parish or community, their new jobs within the church provide the resources for them to further enhance their prestige.

Women's groups are particularly interesting. They offer otherwise politically silent women channels for expressing their views because churches and their groups are often involved in political lobbying. Church groups provide well-educated or prestigious women

[11] Jolly and MacIntyre (1989) describe at length these elements of church impact in the Pacific.

with an alternative to involvement in secular bodies such as the National Council for Women, or the Solomon Islands branch of the international women's organisation, Soroptimist International.[12] As many Honiarans say that leading women in secular organisations are immoral, some women try to obviate such allegations by becoming involved with church groups instead.[13] Because of the Christian morality that churches and their groups expound, it is difficult for onlookers to claim that their leaders are immoral. This is not just a matter of public rhetoric; in private many people make a clear-cut distinction between church group leaders and those of secular women's organisations. If anyone does make allegations of impropriety against church leaders, they only do so among their closest friends, and rather than focusing on sexual misdemeanours, will point out minor offences such as unwelcoming attitudes or the fact that they gossip too much (lack of "quietness").

Once in position, leadership jobs confer prestige and visibility. However, while teachers describe their salaries as central to their prestige, church leaders tend to emphasise how little they earn. This only serves to stress the wealth of their households, as otherwise such positions would not be viable employment for them. Instead, prestige stems from other channels such as the power and visibility of their leadership. Also, church leaders have opportunities for overseas travel to conferences and workshops. Similar to the travel offered to teachers involved in the UNESCO project, this affords status through the travelling itself, and through the gifts brought back for friends and relatives. In addition, leaders' authority and office-space enables them to operate small enterprises from work as adjuncts to their church duties. In 1998, pyramid money-making schemes ("games") were especially popular.[14] The money that leaders gained from them was clear evidence of their standing as competent leaders and organisers, and further augmented their positions.

Despite several churches' public opposition to pyramid money schemes, this did not prevent some of their (lay) leaders becoming involved in them. These schemes worked in various ways, but all centred on paying money into schemes in order to gain significant increment, rather than selling goods. The most common form of scheme involved a person who had already bought into the scheme signing up four new members, and collecting a

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[12] Originally founded in 1921 in California, Soroptomist International is a network of groups of professional and business women in 112 countries. Its organisation and ideals are similar to the Rotary Club. Membership is by invitation only and a primary objective is "service". For example, Soroptomists fund and organise scholarships and health projects.

[13] Zimmer-Tamokoshi (1993*a*; 1993*b*) describes a similar situation in Port Moresby, where men assert that elite, educated women are sexually promiscuous, which serves to denigrate their status and limit any possible political power. In Honiara, both men and women adopt such rhetoric. Therefore, church organisations afford avenues of power to women who want to avoid this kind of criticism.

[14] By the middle of 1998, these schemes were flourishing, including the Italian based Pentagon scheme, and the Solomon Island based A.M.Creative company (see *Solomon Star* 21 July 1998 # 1195: 2; *Solomon Star* 31 July 1998 # 1200: 4).

fixed sum of money from each of them. Each of these four newcomers then had to find four others to sign up, and collected money from each of these new members. These four would then repeat the step, and others after them, creating a perpetual "pyramid" of members. At each collection stage, members sent the money to a central unit. Once four steps in the membership pyramid were complete, then the central unit paid out a substantial sum of money to the apical member. Rumours of big returns abounded and added to the popularity of the scheme. Soon, offices throughout Honiara were filled with discussions about the scheme, and people were asking one another to sign up. It was clear that those who had paid into the scheme early in its inception in the country, and who had managed to encourage enough people to sign up after them, were generally those who had considerable disposable income, powers of persuasion and influence.

Like many office workers in Honiara, some church leaders became especially adept at running the schemes. Their success was largely due to the fact that most find that their offices are subject to a constant stream of visitors: group members come to discuss church or personal matters (church leaders often act as counsellors); and kin use the offices as meeting places. As offices are places where people come to request money from their affluent relatives, the leaders' ability to retain their winnings is particularly interesting. Church leaders received direct requests from relatives for money, and for the loan of bank books in order to withdraw money. Leaders gave some of their winnings to their relatives, but retained significant amounts for themselves. To do this, they sometimes operated more than one bank account. While relatives knew about one, the other was an account where they could lodge the money earned from extra activities, such as the pyramid money schemes. In this way, like teachers engaged in small enterprise, church leaders could put money earned from non-wage activities into their own households. However, because church leaders rarely had peers, then the discourse and criticism that surrounds money-making schemes in schools did not apply to them. In this way, while their positions enabled them to pursue individual money-making schemes, they were also able to withhold resources from kin. Thus, leadership conferred responsibility to mobilise and organise groups of members, but also enabled personal accumulation.

Church events, rejection of the church, and the irrelevance of ethnic ties

Churches inculcate norms of sociability through various means. Involvement in church groups is one method, and explicit moral rhetoric in sermons is another.[15] In addition, social

[15] I do not discuss the rhetoric of sermons. However, in Chapter 7, I discuss the church rhetoric that opposes casinos.

and fund-raising occasions provide opportunities to reformulate ways of dealing with resources, especially money. Fund-raising events are commonplace, usually as a means of raising money for church building and renovation projects. Held at weekends on church grounds, leaders and clergy encourage members of the congregation to bring food and handicrafts for sale. Through these events, they try to encourage Honiarans' engagement with the church and inculcate obligation to give to church funds.

Churches events centre on raising money from households' production of food and crafts in order to redirect these items to the church administration in cash form. Church leaders usually divide fund-raising stall holders into groups, often according to youth, women's and men's groups. Sometimes they divide their parishes into groups based on suburbs, a method they also use to divide congregations into cleaning groups. Interestingly, despite church opposition to the *wantok* system in their rhetoric, occasionally church leaders choose to divide their parishes along ethnic lines for these events. They claim that this serves to mobilise their congregations according to salient social groups, for example, such that Malaitans run one food stall, people from Western Province another, and so forth. In this way, vocal opposition to the *wantok* system is coupled with an awareness of ethnicity's capacity to mobilise action.

However, although church fund-raising events sometimes draw reasonably large crowds, some people are reluctant to become involved, saying that they already have enough work to do in supporting their own families and acceding to the demands of their kin. This echoes their reluctance to contribute to school fund-raising events. This attitude entails both an explicit valorisation of immediate family and a tacit rejection of the importance of the church. While church provides moral and occasional social support, it does little to enhance the financial or material well-being of most families. As urbanites strive to augment their economic and social standing, they become only too aware of this fact and their self-interest lessens the importance of church as a beneficiary.[16]

In schools, teachers opposed the *wantok* system when it did not benefit them, but favoured it when they could use it for their own ends. Honiarans reaction to church employment of ethnic groups was based on similar sentiments. Many rejected church attempts to organise fund-raising groups along ethnic lines, because they claimed that ethnicity should not be emphasised in public, and also because the events brought them no benefit. In this way, church attempts to mobilise ethnic groups undermined Honiarans attempts to be cosmopolitan.

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[16] As far as I could tell, when fund-raising events take place in rural areas, they are more popular than in town.

Furthermore, by dividing their parishioners into ethnic groups, churches are utilising the salient divisions in town, but ignoring the problem of increased numbers of mixed-ethnicity families, as well as the middle class propensity to downplay ethnicity in public spheres. This is relevant when one considers that another church aim is to promote family unity and stability. Deciding which ethnic group to join in with can provoke problems within households, more often in the form of resentment when a wife—as the person who cooks — finds herself preparing food for a fund-raising group that is not of her own ethnicity. Generally though, women in such positions keep such misgivings extremely quiet, for fear of causing conflict with their spouses and affines.

Church leaders are critical of Honiarans' lack of involvement in fund-raising activities. They explicitly criticise self-interest, accumulation and lack of "community spirit". Those who are censured in these ways point out their reasons for not becoming involved and deny these accusations. They add that their involvement would serve not only to support the church and its fabric, but also the status of the group leaders, who themselves are mainly interested in their own prestige. In this way, although Honiarans claim that church leaders are moral than those of secular groups, they are aware of church-leaders' attempts at self-promotion. While they do not always publicly voice criticism of them, they express their mild resistance to leaders and church hierarchy by choosing not to be involved in the activities on offer. The structure and process of churches, and their attempts to inculcate "community spirit", fuel a move towards privileging the demands of nuclear families and households over requests by the church.

Conclusions

Both schools and churches are focal points for emerging social forms. Fundamentally, schools and churches operate as settings where ethnic groups interact on a daily basis, but the morality they foster (albeit not entirely intentionally) is one of individual and household self-enhancement. To a large extent this is expressed and reconfirmed through forms of exchange and giving. In Section 2, I described gifts given between middle class families. These were significantly less utilitarian than those given to poorer, rural relatives. Similar themes arise in the course of relationships at schools and churches: gifts between colleagues do entail an expectation of return, but are luxury items radically different to the cash that church leaders and teachers send, or give, to their poorer relatives, from whom they expect no return. Christian ideals may serve to encourage urbanites' view that disinterested giving is a good thing to do, and this is turn actually serves to promote self-interest in all senses. As

Parry points out "The ideology of the pure gift may thus itself promote and entrench the ideological elaboration of a domain in which self-interest rules supreme" (1986: 469).

While both institutions operate outside households, they often rely on household and ethnic groups as a backdrop for their activities, and claim to support family units. For example, fund-raising events try to mobilise family members to become involved. However, as these institutions emphasise nuclear family structures, then Honiarans who can afford to do so feel increasingly less compelled to engage with their activities, choosing to privilege themselves and their immediate families instead. While at school, this facilitates a degree of disaffection and ambivalence among staff, and the hierarchy of church enables more blatant rejection of obligations to, and participation in, such institutions.

In the final chapter, I further explore the self-interest of affluent Honiarans. I explain how they make decisions about the constitution of morally acceptable behaviour in public arenas, and how they negotiate their obligations to kin, friends and selves. I also show how their freedom is constantly in play, and in conflict, with the values of churches and home.

Chapter 7

Playing for freedom: casinos and night-clubs

In the previous chapter, I explained how schools and churches enhance affluent urbanites' identification with one another as *moden*, cosmopolitan people. As town has grown, commercially organised recreation has become part of the everyday activities and rhetoric of those with enough money to pay for it. Many affluent Honiarans explained that casinos and night-clubs provided the newest and most "modern" ways for them to enjoy themselves. They provide regular meeting points, and like schools and churches, members of the middle class downplay ethnicity while they are there. These recreational spheres divide urbanites along socio-economic lines, such that only the more affluent Honiarans can afford to engage in the "play" that I describe in this chapter. While the casinos and night-clubs are ostensibly recreational spheres, I show how casinos also constitute work, as Honiarans gamble to earn money for themselves and their households. Here I continue to discuss Honiarans' attempts to raise money, but show how attitudes to casinos are so heavily permeated by concern about morality—particularly sexual—that this is no easy task.

In the previous chapter, I focused on schools and churches as social workplaces, encompassing both play and work. Here I examine further how the boundaries between work and play are shifting and ambiguous. In particular, casino gambling fulfils two ambitions: Honiarans see it as modern recreational pastime, but hope to draw on gambling success to swell their personal and households' finances. As such, casino gambling is another example of how patterns of general obligation to wide kin networks are being replaced by acquisition and accumulation by individuals and their households. This enhances middle class orientations away from connections with home and kin. Practices and discourses surrounding night-clubs also exemplify this shift, but through the medium of play.

Both casinos and night-clubs are constant sources of gossip, especially about moral rectitude. Such gossip draws on ideas of *kastom* and Christianity, and conflicts with many middle class notions of modern sociability. Clergy and church leaders are particularly vocal in expressing opposition to the casinos, claiming that they are sources of moral ills and marital and family dissolution. Rural Solomon Islanders describe Honiara as an immoral environment because of the effects of casinos and night-clubs. Papataxiarchis describes men's gambling in Aegean Greece as an act of resistance against encompassing hierarchies, that gaming is "the site of antagonism between the local society and encompassing orders" (Papataxiarchis 1999: 159). It seems that middle class casino-going in Honiara is a form of resistance against the views of church and home. Honiarans' insistence on casino gambling,

and their participation in night-clubs, serves as a rejection of the rhetoric of church and home. Through such participation, they also become more closely aligned with the encompassing forces of foreign norms.

Casinos and night-clubs are public spheres, yet operate according to exclusive policies. In this way, these spaces offer similar privacy to that of domestic settings, but by allowing friends to socialise away from the gaze of relatives, permit a greater range of inter-ethnic connections and enable them to engage in activities frowned on by rural relatives. Importantly though, despite the degree of inter-ethnic contact that these settings precipitate, ethnic differences are rarely discussed, and conversation focuses more on how these sites are urban and modern. However, despite the freedom that these spheres engender, Honiarans partially adhere to the proscriptions of home and church when they engage in them. For instance, I describe how women hide from the gaze of relatives and affines when entering casinos, and how one woman felt unable to attend a night-club because her father-in-law was staying at her house.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of women's enjoyment at a night-club, and the problems it provokes. The women say that their visits to the night-club, and their laughter, joking and enjoyment while there, reflect and reinforce their view of urban life as significantly more pleasant and free than the parochial lives of their rural relatives. However, they also acknowledge that they are nonetheless constrained by the views of rural relatives, their households and their husbands. I consider how women who go to night-clubs conform to the control of family and neighbours in a way that seems to be acquiescence. However, they describe their behaviour as the most appropriate way to balance the values of home and town life-styles without causing offence. As such, they gently resist the values of home, but are careful to disguise their resistance.

The development of casino culture in Honiara

Literature on Melanesian gambling has generally focused on card and dice games. Most writers analyse gambling as a social and economic activity that reflects or enhances social processes already taking place. For example, Maclean states that, "gambling extends the range of sociability and cooperation" in the Jimi Valley (1984: 44); Zimmer argues that Gende gambling is delayed, reciprocal exchange, which parallels and complements more general Gende "traditional exchange patterns" (1986: 262); and W. Mitchell suggests that Wape gambling complements the "Wape traditional exchange system in the preservation of

male egalitarianism" (1988: 238). As such, these writers see gambling as expressing local factions and hierarchies.[1]

Small-scale card (and occasionally dice) gambling is popular throughout the Solomon Islands. In villages and in town, men and women play *kura* ("cards") under the shade of trees in the daytime and by lamp-light after dark. Since 1988, the government has allowed casinos to operate, and four casinos soon opened their doors. Because casinos involve professional—often foreign—staff, they are rather different to the gambling relationships and competition of *kura*. While this does not mean that casino gambling does not complement the gambling that takes place elsewhere in Honiara, it does mean that it is fundamentally different to the locally managed games described by Maclean, Zimmer and Mitchell. In these writers' descriptions of gambling, players draw on local enmities as the basis for organising their games. Honiarans say that they are not gambling against one another. Instead, they gamble against the casino and its dealers, whom they see as representatives of the casino, rather than personally. In this way, casino gambling is also not a matter of competition between local factions. Instead, Honiarans pit themselves against the foreign casinos, and attempt to control risk through magical means. Paradoxically, through their competitive engagement with foreign forms, they become encompassed in them. Furthermore, gamblers' perceptions of casinos invariably focus on the chance to win rather than to lose. On the other hand, those opposed to casinos focus on possible losses: particularly those that are moral.

Many Solomon Islanders find casinos contentious, in particular, issues of gender and morality are at the forefront of opposition to casinos. It is important to note here that rural Solomon Islanders and members of the church hierarchy are the most opposed to casinos, but this does not mean that all middle class Honiarans are casino-goers. Some agree with the anti-casino rhetoric of churches and rural relatives, or despise the casinos because of personal experiences. For instance, one woman committed suicide, which her family said was the direct result of her husband staying away from his house to gamble at all hours. People generally appraise gamblers with regard to their morality, rather than strictly in terms of their financial losses and gains. They especially denigrate women who gamble. Church and magic also have their places among the blackjack tables: the former provides a strong voice of opposition, the latter a force used for good fortune. However, contrary to church rhetoric, it is not that the casinos create a new dynamic in town, merely that they display and reinforce a shift that is already emerging.

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[1] These descriptions of gambling are also similar to deep-play described by Geertz (1973), whereby village factions pit themselves against one another through their cockfights.

In 1988, the Solomon Islands government passed amendments to the Gaming Act, which allowed casino operations under the control of a Gaming and Lotteries Board. Initially, only Club 88 and Super Club opened, the latter becoming Club Supreme in 1996. It was the opening of Honiara Gaming Club in 1994 that caused most uproar, as it allowed access without membership. Most dissent stemmed from the churches, whose leaders claimed that they had been deceived into believing that casinos would only be allowed to operate on a membership basis. They claimed that open access casinos meant that high-stake casino gambling was too available, and many "vulnerable" Honiarans would engage in it.

The government requires casino operators to pay for licences and to give 5% of their income to the government as tax. Since 1998, they have been required to charge entrance fees, which should go directly into government coffers. In 1996 and the first half of 1997, four casinos operated in Honiara, but in September 1997, the government revoked two of their gaming licences amid ongoing debate about the ill-effects of casinos. Officials claimed that the two casinos had failed to pay their licence fees and taxes, and that one of them did not adhere to guidelines about suitability for tourists. Although very few tourists visited the casinos, the operators and government often represented them as tourist attractions in order to justify their presence. When all four were still open, they could easily be ranked according to their customers' wealth: Solomon Casino catered for the least affluent gamblers, Honiara Casino was the haunt of the middle class, while Club Supreme and Club 88 were favoured by the wealthy elite and Chinese population.[2]

Solomon Casino, near Point Cruz, was the least salubrious of Honiara's casinos, even its VIP section looked worse for wear. It was usually jammed with young men wearing ripped army pants and bandannas, who gambled with cash earned on boats or taken from the hands of relatives. It was a predominantly male environment, which women said would have been threatening if the men were not quite so absorbed by the blackjack tables. In the same building as Solomon Casino, Honiara Casino catered for a slightly more upmarket clientele: mainly office workers and school teachers. The management enforced a dress code after 6 p.m., which prohibited *slipa* (flip-flops) or open-heeled sandals, and insisted that men did not have bare shoulders. Both Honiara and Solomon Casinos were owned by factions of a

[2] According to government figures (SISO 1995*b*: 11. Table 1.2.1), 379 Chinese Solomon Islanders were resident in the country in 1986. Most of them run stores and businesses, especially those involved in importing goods from overseas. The Chinese population is generally wealthy, they own large houses, cars and tend to travel overseas frequently. There is a certain amount of animosity between Solomon Island Chinese and the rest of the population, not least because of the former's perceived entrepreneurial success. The majority of Chinese in Solomon Islands today are descendants of, or in some way connected to, the Chinese traders who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bennett (1987: 206-209) discusses this early wave of immigration, and 55 Chinese were resident in the Solomon Islands by 1920.

Plate 19: Honiara Casino and Solomon Casino at Point Cruz.

single company that had previously run Honiara Gaming Club from 1994 to 1995, in the building that later became Solomon Casino's premises (see plate 19).

While anyone with enough cash and the correct attire could walk into the two casinos at Point Cruz, Club 88 and Club Supreme operated on a membership basis, and hence encountered less opposition. Both were primarily owned by Solomon Island Chinese, and had integral restaurants and up-market decor, which included potted plants in corners and framed prints on the walls. Club 88 was in Chinatown, and Club Supreme on the sea front at Kukum. During daylight, its garish salmon-coloured paintwork stood out against the blue sky, while at night flashing multi-coloured lights announced, "Club Supreme" and "Fortune Restaurant" (see plate 20). The Fortune Restaurant served Chinese cuisine, but the prices were well out of reach of most Solomon Islanders' wage packets, so the restaurant tended to be frequented mainly by members of the Chinese and expatriate communities. Casino entrance fees were also high: SI$500 for lifetime membership, or SI$60 for one night, which was prohibitively expensive for most people. For SI$60, customers received a "free" drink, access to the bar, and the chance to pay to play snooker, blackjack, roulette or gaming-machines. There was no dress code at Club Supreme, as the high costs alone ensured a wealthy, well-dressed clientele.

Plate 20: Club Supreme at Kukum.

In these ways, the four casinos reflected and reinforced social divisions broadly based on affluence. The wealthy elite frequented Club Supreme and Club 88; my middle class informants visited Honiara Casino; while those with limited low incomes went to Solomon Casino. Importantly, urbanites saw casinos as imported, foreign forms of recreation. Casino operators tried to lessen this impact by employing Solomon Islanders as staff and embellishing gaming tokens with images of cowrie shells, but their foreignness was actually part of their appeal. Middle class people's discussions of trips overseas invariably mention casinos they have seen or been to, and many assume that casinos are part of everyday life for foreigners. Several people discussed their visits to the Treasury Casino in Brisbane as the highlight of an overseas trip, and often asked me what casinos were like at my home.

Iumi go plei ("we go to play"): a visit to Honiara Casino

Gaining people's—specifically women's—trust enough for them to take me with them to "play" (*plei)* at a casino took some time. However, after becoming friends with three school teachers, and asking several times if I could join them at a casino, they agreed. They told me not to wear *slipa*, and to be ready after teaching finished in the afternoon, from where they took me in a taxi speeding through the dust and traffic to get to Honiara Casino. The women often went there, although all had also been to Solomon Casino at some point. They preferred Honiara Casino, saying that the punters were generally better behaved, less rough and there were fewer women of ill-repute. At that time, only one of our group had been to a more upmarket casino. Her husband held a well-paid government position, and although she was not a member herself, she could afford to pay the entrance fee at the Club Supreme. After my first casino visit, and my friends' observation that I was capable of gambling too, I was always made welcome on such trips.

The women asked the taxi driver to make a u-turn on the main road to drop us right outside the large wooden doors of Honiara Casino. They said that this would make their destination less obvious to passers-by. Although anyone who knew these women would have known about their regular gambling, the women preferred to act as if it was a secret: an illicit pastime to be kept quiet and giggled about. Honiara is small enough that a relative, affine, or acquaintance might easily see them going in through the casino's door, and the women were particularly concerned that affines or relatives would see them. On one occasion I met a regular casino-goer wandering around, apparently aimlessly, at shops near to Honiara Casino. I asked her what she was doing, and she replied that some of her husband's female relatives were nearby, so she did not want them to see her going into the casino. In fact, her husband had given her cash that day, in full knowledge of her intention to gamble. The problem was not that her affines would tell her husband, as he knew she went to the casino. Instead, she was concerned that they would gossip among themselves about her morality. Her secretive attitude reflected an awareness of the power of malicious gossip, rather than a belief that others did not know about her behaviour. In the previous chapter, I described how urbanites hold that the size of Honiara's milieu makes it possible for them to avoid church without their relatives noticing. The fact that they say the opposite about casinos highlights the risk of rather extreme judgements being made about them because of their gambling. While non-attendance at church only indicates disrespect, opponents to casinos claim that attending them indicates immorality, particularly because of the effects of gambling on families, as I discuss below.

Once the taxi had turned and disgorged us onto the pavement, we sprang towards the door, the women checking for familiar faces to the right and left. Two uniformed security guards at the door asked us to show our cash (to prove we *had* come to gamble). Having seen our money, they allowed us to enter, and we passed another guard who clicked a counting device as each of us went past, to record the number of punters that day. The guards asked us to leave our bags at the door on shelves, and exchanged them for numbered tags before we passed through a second set of doors into the casino's ground floor.

At this point our group split up: one woman stayed downstairs to play on the gaming machines, the rest of us moved upstairs to the blackjack tables. Honiara Casino was divided into two floors. The lower had three rows of gaming-machines; three blackjack tables; a bar selling non-alcoholic drinks; and a cashier's desk for exchanging cash with machine tokens and gaming chips. The upper floor had six blackjack tables, a roulette wheel, a poker table, and a table for baccarat. Usually, only the blackjack tables were in operation—but occasionally the others were too—especially after the press had reported an unusually large win at the casino.[3]

The expressions on people's faces at the blackjack tables were not those of animated enjoyment but of hard work. Gamblers saw this pastime known as "play" as performing a very real economic function for themselves and their households. One woman spoke of a time when she needed to raise money for her son's school fees.[4] She took her last SI$50 to the casino and won the several hundred dollars needed for the bill. A big loss, however, means no food for a household, or undesirable debt to relatives if householders have to borrow money to buy necessities. Players dreamt of repeating past wins, but more often lived in a reality where their wage packets were eaten by the slots on the blackjack tables and gaming machines.

On the upper floor of Honiara Casino, blackjack incurred a minimum stake of SI$10; downstairs the minimum was SI$5. On the occasion I describe, our group started gambling on the upper floor, but usually the women stayed on the ground floor, where they could win or lose at a slower pace. But after losing between SI$50 and SI$60 each, through concentrated effort, we retreated downstairs to the machines and SI$5 stake blackjack. We spent an hour or so there, amid the air-conditioning hum and cigarette smoke, until we had lost nearly all of our money. Subsequent visits to the casino were similar: playing machines

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[3] For example, in 1997, the *Solomon Star* ran the headline "$2 wins $50,000", and a photograph of a woman who had won this sum while playing Pacific Poker at Honiara Casino (*Solomon Star* 3 September 1997 # 1064: 1).

[4] Levine and Levine make a similar observation of women's gambling in Port Moresby, where women "claim to feed their families and contribute significant amounts of cash for other purchases"(1979:57).

and blackjack until the money was gone, then riding the bus home with barely enough money left for the fare.

Morality, foreignness and controlling money

Staff employed by casinos in Honiara numbered over 1,000 in 1997. The presence of Solomon Island staff is important as they mediate between gamblers and the casino owners, and are subject to moral evaluations. The foreign element of casinos is highlighted from the instant that gamblers enter them, as they have the appearance of those across the globe: fruit machines from Australia, complete with koala bears and kangaroos; gaming table felt from London; and security cameras from some other overseas company.

A dealer and a watcher stood behind every blackjack table. In addition to handling the cards, dealers took cash in exchange for gambling chips. Watchers observed proceedings, in order to prevent any cheating and to keep an eye on the money crossing the tables. Closed-circuit cameras aimed downwards from the ceiling made a third pair of observational eyes at each table. The majority of dealers were Solomon Island "young girls" (*yang gele*), although there were also some young men and boys. Their salaries were reasonable and conditions not terribly easy, but not too tough either. Both gamblers and those opposed to casinos said that many dealers supplemented their salaries by prostitution. Comments made by gamblers about the ethnicity of the dealers were the only explicit references to ethnicity in casinos, which were clearly associated with moral probity. Soliciting of the most subtle kind went on over the blackjack table, but in the foyers and hallways it was often more explicit. Recently the Ministry of Health ran a sex-education workshop for female casino workers, which the churches argued was an admission of the existence of prostitution at the casinos.

Casino goers were adamant that the girls who worked at the casinos not only solicited for sex, but also frequently got pregnant and generally had low moral standards. One man talked of how the girl dealers would keep an eye on whom was winning at the table, then approach them later. He claimed to have taken up such offers himself, saying that afterwards he had regretted it because he had felt guilty and ashamed. Nearly all women in Honiara were suspicious of the girl dealers, and many said that they would not allow their daughters to work at casinos. Earlier, I mentioned how women gamblers had to be careful to avoid negative moral evaluations, but for the staff at casinos such evaluations were largely inevitable.

Australian expatriates filled most high management and accountancy posts at casinos. Expatriates worked behind the scenes, and only appeared on the gambling floor on rare occasions. The human face of the casinos was that of Solomon Islanders. Government

permission for casino licences partly rested on the premise that they provided employment for Solomon Islanders, so it was important that casino operators honoured this. In addition, it seems likely that casino operators believed that too many expatriate faces would prove off-putting to the customers, whereas Solomon Island faces made the whole scheme appear less alien. Although most gamblers were fully aware that the casinos filtered their money into expatriate pockets, and were attracted to the casinos in part by their foreignness, perhaps the presence of Solomon Island intermediaries as dealers did make the flow of cash out of their own hands and into those of foreigners less obvious and therefore less troubling. In this context then, the foreign was construed as simultaneously exerting attractive and repulsive forces.

To play on fruit machines, gamblers must first exchange their cash for tokens. At Honiara Casino these tokens were embellished with a representation of a cowrie shell. As mentioned above, it is in the casino's best business interests to encourage gambling by using a Solomon Island facade, and the cowries are probably part of this ploy. However, this metallic mimicry of *kastom* shell money also seems emblematic of the new networks and obligations, which the casinos encourage. Money used in casinos is that which gamblers claim belongs to them and their spouses. It hails from wages, small enterprise, and income such as rent or royalties from logging or mining companies.

Cash used within the casino walls is in the form of chips for the tables and tokens for the gaming machines. In this form, money has the potential to either grow or diminish: it can be either fecund or barren (see Parry 1989). To make it fecund, or to increase its pre-existing fecundity, some gamblers employ magic, and Honiarans claim that some people have been banned from casinos using magic successfully. Regular gamblers, whom I interviewed, said they had heard of types of casino magic, but claimed never to have tried themselves. One commonly cited method was for a gambler to find a gecko with a forked tail, remove that tail and keep it in their pocket. The gecko should be released and will grow another tail. Then, while it is running, the gambler will win; but while it is still, the gambler will lose. However, nobody could tell me if it was possible to control whether the gecko was running or not. Another method involved gamblers putting leaves from a particularly efficacious plant in their pockets, touching they money that they would use to buy tokens or gambling chips. Or,

gamblers could use Choiseul black stone, *parana*, instead of leaves.[5] Gamblers said that both leaf and *parana* methods could bring good fortune if used correctly.

This use of supernatural powers in order to make money grow, is reminiscent of Taussig's (1977) description of baptism of bank-notes by Christian peasants in Colombia.[6] However, while Colombians invoke the devil to make money fecund, and see commodity exchange as morally dubious, gamblers in Honiara do not tend to make such associations between casino magic and evil. Largely this can be connected to their perception of *kastom* as largely complementary to Christianity,[7] and also in the way that the magic operates. Players of blackjack say that good fortune occurs because of the cards, not because of the action of the money or gamblers. Those using magic perform the magical act on the money (for example, by touching efficacious leaves), but it is the cards that must be "strong" in order for the player to win. Conversely, if a gambler loses, it is not because of lack of own skill, or because of the dealers skill, but is because "the [casino's] cards were powerful." Of course, this strength may have been caused by the dealer's own use of magic, which some say casino owners pay to have on their premises. In this way, although Honiarans claim that it is the action ("strength") of the cards that makes money multiply, the action of the cards is influenced by the magical practices of the gamblers and dealers.

In Chapter 6, I discussed tensions over money, and how money from entrepreneurial business was the source of disagreement, especially among school teachers. Gustafsson explains that during gambling among Titan in Papua New Guinea, "individuals that normally would have to avoid each other ... would sit down and play in the same room" (1998: 187), such that games represent an inversion of normal social rules. In Honiara, the relationships within casinos, and people's use of money, reflect everyday relationships and orientations outside casino walls. Despite the fact that gamblers work alone and make individual choices about their money, winnings are firmly embedded within social networks. They say that if

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[5] *Parana* is a stone from the *parana* river of north-eastern Choiseul. Generally, people use it to protect themselves or their households from other magic, by eating a little, or keeping some on their person or in their house. While the owners of the area from where *parana* hails say that it should not be sold for money, often it is the case that Solomon Islanders sell it to one another. Honiarans belonging to many ethnic groups employ *parana*, saying that it is particularly efficacious and ask their Choiseulese friends to obtain some for them (see Akin 1996*b* for a description of Kwaio use of *parana* while working at plantations away from home). However, the owners of the areas where *parana* comes from belong to the Seventh Day Adventist Church and see gamblers' use of *parana* to bring gambling luck as highly illegitimate.

[6] The Colombian peasants described by Taussig believe that if a person conceals a bill of money in their hand while holding the child at baptism, then the bill receives the baptism rather than the child. The bill then becomes essentially fertile, a state that Taussig claims is unnatural for money. He argues that money is naturally barren.

[7] Of course, this is not always the case. In particular, clergy and some devout Christians are strongly opposed to any form of *kastom* magic.

they win a large sum, then their success soon becomes public knowledge through networks of gossip. One regular gambler explained, "it's strange, but whenever I win, it seems that everyone in Honiara knows about it before I've even left the casino building." He added that this made it difficult for him to keep his winnings for himself and his immediate family, as he would prefer to, but felt obligated to give money to many of his relatives. Smaller casino winnings are less problematic, as gamblers can tuck them into their pockets to take back to households: as I mentioned earlier, many gamblers claim that winnings help to pay for expenses ranging from food to school-fees. Friends also make gifts of winnings to one another, but usually do so within the walls of the casino in small amounts of chips or tokens. In these ways, rather than being an inversion of everyday life, casino gambling reinforces the tensions inherent in the obligations and relationships that I have highlighted throughout the thesis.

The opposition: churches and public opinion

In the previous chapter, I described the importance of church as a social and work setting; churches also assert themselves as providers of moral guidance. Leaders from every denomination in the Solomon Islands are vocal in their opposition to the casinos. The opposition of the five largest churches is channelled into their umbrella organisation, the Solomon Island Christian Association (SICA).[8] At SICA meetings, church leaders make national action plans, which their member churches implement. Such plans have included speaking against the casinos from the pulpit, especially when that particular service is to be broadcast live on national radio. Also, church women's groups are encouraged to voice opposition to casinos in order to reach other women, and through them to reach their husbands. The churches' anti-casino rhetoric is moralistic in tone, portraying them as dens of sin, encouraging marital and family breakdown, and prostitution. As the Executive Secretary of SICA explained, they are taking a stand against the more general erosion of "Christian values". The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Melanesia are not opposed to gambling in principle, but are opposed to what they claim are its ill effects on society. The other members of SICA—the South Sea Evangelical Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the United Church—take a fundamentalist stance, arguing that any form of

[8] In 1997, SICA was made up of the five main churches in the Solomon Islands: Church of Melanesia, Roman Catholic Church, United Church, South Sea Evangelical Church, and Seventh Day Adventist Church. SICA was originally founded in 1967, and leaders from its member churches meet regularly together to discuss issues pertinent to all of them. In particular, they are active in representing church views to the government on issues such as education, health, development and "moral issues". Often they make recommendations directly to policy makers, but also publicise their views through the media.

gambling is un-Christian and should be prohibited. These five SICA member churches have agreed to adopt a middle line, and jointly campaign against public access casinos by focusing on what they see as their harmful effects.

SICA campaigns include press releases, with emotive tones. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Honiara, Adrian Smith, who originally hails from Ireland, has been especially prolific in publicly voicing his opposition to casinos. He regularly contributes letters and poems to Honiara's newspapers for publication, such as this excerpt from *Fathers of the Nation you don't seem to care*:

> What of the Fathers of the Nation?
> When we ask for a better standard of living
> do they not offer us a snake?
> To meet the costs of the nation
> they grant CASINO LICENCES.
> Those snakes are biting so many families.
> Digging holes in the path of those who struggle,
> is to lay traps, which will cause many to fall.
> Gambling which starts as a game becomes a sickness.
> Like all games, it must have protective rules built in.
>
> (A. Smith, 1996. With the author's permission)

Smith's assertion that gambling is like a "sickness" is borne out in many of the metaphors used by opponents to casinos. Although my direct experience of casinos was always with women, many more men than women go. However, the number of women who go regularly is not insubstantial: approximately 20% to 30% of a casino's clientele at any one time are women. When a man goes, he incurs the wrath of his church and spouse for wasting the household's money. But when a woman goes to casinos, many claim that not only is she wasting money, but possibly wasting herself. People who do not go to casinos will say that she is putting herself at risk, and therefore is morally dubious. This is because many people assume that women who lose money at the casino try to make up their losses by selling their bodies in prostitution, and are prey to the temptation of men who offer them money. This is not necessarily the case—but is said to be—especially by those women whose husbands will not let them go to the casino. This is reflected in women's attempts to avoid the eyes of their relatives when going through the casino doors.

The role of gender relations is further highlighted by the fact that some women claim that their luck may be governed by the quality of their relationships with their husbands. For example, that if a woman and her husband argue before one of them goes, then the gambler

will lose. However, if the marriage is harmonious, then they are more likely to win, unless other factors—such as magic—are at work.

Not only are women's bodies at moral risk from sexual activity at casinos, those who speak out against casinos say that both men and women are at risk from physical disease. They often mention sexually transmitted diseases, and believe that they spread out to households from the casinos, as if the moral trait of the casinos impinges on innocent family members. However, it is not only sexually transmitted diseases that are cited. In 1997, an article in the *Solomon Star* newspaper reported that the doctor in charge of the tuberculosis ward at Honiara's Central Hospital claimed that three cases of tuberculosis were linked to regular casino attendance (*Solomon Star* 30 May 1997 #1023: 1). Soon, fear of the disease spread throughout casino-goers, but prevented few from going. Months later, people opposed to casinos were mentioning this, saying that they thought the casinos should be closed down because of their link to tuberculosis. Bodily health became a moral issue, inseparable from the supposed sexual licence at the casinos.

Gambling activities are remarkably individualistic, as people make choices about whether to take another card or not, and how much to place as stakes. More fundamentally, Honiarans decide whether to go to casinos or not, in the light of anti-casino discourse. One woman, commenting on government moves to discourage and even prevent high ranking public servants from going to the casinos, exclaimed: "I think it should be individual choice." Others disagree, and claim that the government should withhold casino licences, and that free choice does not serve the community well. Rhetoric in favour of casinos often constructs choice as individualistic, and it is this that opponents including SICA seek to curtail, claiming that gambling has ill effects on "family" and "community". However, those who resist such rhetoric by continuing to gamble, claim to use their earnings in support of their households, and see their gambling as work, which enhances rather than destroys family units.

Casinos, then, are a part of Honiara's milieu that entail disagreement about the constitution of appropriate behaviour. The moral rhetoric that surrounds gamblers and dealers, as well as the financial implications and obligations towards kin, which gamblers must fulfil, all highlight tensions between middle class desires and those of the church and home. Furthermore, except in descriptions of the female dealers, ethnicity is rarely an issue during the work of gambling. The point is that rather than casinos destroying the cultural logic of town, as the church rhetoric tries to insist, they actually only highlight, and perhaps reinforce, the rather fraught emergence of cosmopolitan urbanites and their *moden* modes of behaviour.

Red wine on ice: the "Sundowners" night-club

I have already discussed the roles of casinos, workplaces and churches as public settings for middle class sociability. Night-clubs constitute the fourth and final key public setting for people's establishment of urban social life outside households. Unlike customers at casinos, night-clubbers say that they attend primarily to socialise and have fun: to "play". However, like casinos, night-clubs are contested moral arenas. For some, night-clubs are acceptable, forming part of their conceptualisation of a "modern" (*moden*), outward-looking sociability. Others see them as improper venues, where no morally upright person should go. In this section, I mainly focus on the Sundowners Club, which is strictly for women only. Its clientele and organisers try to ensure that people do not see their customers as immoral. Despite their efforts, discourse about the club shows that it does constitute a disputed moral environment, which encapsulates concerns about the interface between *kastom* and *moden* practices.

Honiara is home to several night-clubs, ranging from the newer Heron and Freeway Clubs, to the long-established Guadalcanal Club. Generally these clubs are places where young, single Honiarans go late on weekend evenings to dance, drink and meet their girlfriends or boyfriends. Some married people go too, although on several occasions I heard of this precipitating bouts of domestic violence once they arrived back at their houses (see Chapter 3). DJs play a mixture of International and Solomon Islands pop music, alongside occasional performances by live bands. People from all walks of life go to these mixed clubs, as long as they have sufficient dollars in their pockets for the entrance fee and drinks. Clubs open in the late evening, and remain so until the early hours of the morning, when youngsters try to creep back into their houses without waking their parents, and older people sneak back trying not to wake their spouses or children. Those who go to clubs see them as an important part of the fun and freedom of town life, and stress that they cannot go to such events at home, because they do not exist.

Night-clubs are essentially public places, but like casinos, they have connotations of illicitness, and operate behind closed doors. In this way, they are in-between public and private spheres. Like houses, they have boundaries, but unlike houses, people may enter them without invitation. Like public occasions, they are open to all comers, but night-clubs do operate behind doors, gates, entrance fees and regulations. The secrecy that accompanies visits to clubs is indicative of their morally dubious status, especially as they enable males

and females to meet one another, to drink alcohol, and to dance.[9] Ambivalence about clubs is rooted in a mix of Christian and *kastom* values, which many Honiarans associate with *hom.*

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, many people hold that casinos and night-clubs encourage infidelity and marital break-down. The organisers of Sundowners try to remove fears about infidelity by providing a strictly women-only venue. From 5 p.m. until 9 p.m. on the last Friday of every month, the King Solomon Hotel gives over its function room to women's drunken hilarity and dancing. While there are no limits on age, only those who are affluent enough to afford the SI$15 entrance fee and the expensive drinks are able to attend. Because of this, clubbers tend to be mature, older married women rather than the teenagers who frequent other night-spots. Usually over 100 women attend Sundowners, including some expatriates and a few members of the Chinese population.

Although some churches prohibit consumption of alcohol by their members,[10] its consumption is increasingly popular, especially among men. While men drink at most social gatherings, women generally do not. Most urbanites associate drinking with progress and modernity,[11] which translates into women's impropriety: many they say that women who drink in the public eye are prostitutes. While in part this may be true, it is not the fact that they sell sex that affords them this label, but instead is the fact that they drink. Women avoid this kind of accusation by drinking behind closed doors, and by choosing alcoholic drinks other than beer: many women say that they prefer the sweeter flavour of wine, or spirits ("hot stuff") with mixers such as Coca Cola. They add that such drinks seem less potent to them than beer, and that if anyone sees them drinking wine or spirits, they are likely to assume that they are consuming soft drinks. Therefore, at the Sundowners Club, women say that they feel able to drink with abandon for two reasons. First, there are no men to watch them drink and label them as loose. Second, they are safely behind closed doors drinking with other drinkers, protected from the disproving gaze of less *moden* women.

Women at Sundowners maintain that appropriate and moral behaviour may entail alcohol and dancing, provided that no men are present. This space is one of the few places where women can get together to drink, smoke and dance to the latest pop hits. It is important that the club only admits women, as they can behave in ways that would be deemed improper if men were present. They see this as rather risqué, but on the right side of a thin moral divide because men are not there, and all married women seek their husbands'

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[9] For example, Donner has noted church opposition of "Western style dancing" on Sikaiana, where, "in 1981 guitar dances were curtailed by the local church committee because many parents felt the Western style dancing was leading to pre-marital sexual affairs" (1993: 545).
[10] Notably, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, see Chapter 6.
[11] See Smith (1994: 184) for a similar observation in Papua New Guinea.

permission before they go. Importantly, they also see their actions as ways to engage in a modernity which touches on immorality, without ever quite crossing into absolute impropriety.

While casinos conflate values of work and play, those who go to night-clubs claim that they are purely for fun. In particular, they say that night-clubs are risqué, urban forms of sociality, which involve flaunting many everyday prohibitions. Women who go to Sundowners drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and dance: all of which are practices that they would rarely or never perform outside the protective walls of the club. This is highlighted by women's mirth at their own activities within the clubs, and the constant giggling that accompanies plans to go to Sundowners. However, although activities at Sundowners are an inversion of everyday life, they are nuanced by norms beyond the club's walls. Women say that they are modern and "free", and that only affluent women can afford to go. But they add that the special set-up of the club, and their attempts to avoid censure by *lokol* people means that their actions conform to the demands of home and family enough to avoid offence and attendant conflict.

Going to Sundowners

Sundowners brings together affluent urban women, most of whom know one another through work, school or reputation. As such, it is an expression of urban sociability, openly borrowing overseas ideals of drinking and smoking together; dancing to pop music; and dressing up. Most women know about the Sundowners club by word or mouth, although its organisers also advertise in the *Solomon Star* newspaper. Women discuss going to Sundowners for several weeks in advance. During the week beforehand, they make plans to get ready after work—or after their household chores are finished—then to meet up near the centre of town. Preparations involve dressing up in fine clothes, and obtaining enough money for the evening. To do the latter, most women withdraw money from their personal or family bank accounts, ask their husband's for money, or occasionally gamble at a casino as "fund-raising". Once women have met up in town and praised one another's clothes, they make their way to the King Solomon Hotel not far from Point Cruz.

At the hotel's function room, women pay an entry fee, which gives them entry into the bar and disco. It also pays for cheery name tags, which proclaim: "Hello, I'm ....."; snacks of sandwiches, fried fish, meatballs and fruit; plus a ticket for a prize draw for a bottle of wine. Although doors open at 5 p.m., it usually takes until 7 p.m. before the dimly lit room is full, but by then it buzzes with chat and laughter; the air thick with cigarette smoke and the smell of alcohol. Women sit together in groups of friends who usually buy drinks in

casual rounds of red or white wine with ice or double measure spirits rather than small "half-nip" singles. Women also freely offer cigarettes between them. Many only smoke at such occasions, and not in front of their husbands: they "hide their smoking" (*smok haed*).

Although there is no dress code at Sundowners, women make a point of dressing up for the occasion, initially commenting on one another when they meet up beforehand. While many wear modest dresses, some wear trousers and others short skirts; all wear shoes or sandals rather than everyday *slipa* ("flip-flops"). Nearly all of them have well-coifed hair, jewellery and make-up. Women say that their efforts are for the sake of themselves and their female friends, and that they appreciate the opportunity to bring out their finery. As the evening wears on, the women get more drunk, the laughter more raucous, and less inhibited women start dancing.

The women-only policy is slightly infringed by the hotel's provision of male staff, women's attitudes to this show the importance of gender segregation to them. Some complain that the DJs and bar staff are men, saying that it should be women only, like it used to be. That way as they get drunk and dance, they will not feel "ashamed" (*sem*). In the event though, women mention the effects of alcohol as justifications for their willingness to lay aside inhibitions and shame.

In Section 2, I discussed circumscriptions on women's movements in town, for example, they neither leave their houses on their own, nor after dark. I also explained that these restrictions may reflect a dominant masculine ideology and control, but are adopted by women as appropriate ways to behave. The Sundowners Club makes concessions to these norms not only by providing a women-only venue, but also by closing early. Most women go straight home at 9 p.m., when Sundowners finishes and the venue becomes a regular night-club; usually, their husbands come to collect them. Sometimes women find that their husbands prevent them from going, or that circumstances within their household at the time mean that it is inappropriate for them to attend. For instance, a woman failed to show up for a Sundowners evening with some of her colleagues from work. Planning the excursion had made for much excitement: the women decided in advance what they would wear and how they would meet. When their friend did not arrive at the stated meeting place, the women started guessing that her husband had prevented her from coming. They were annoyed at this, saying that he had let her come before, and that his actions were an attempt to spoil her friendships, which contradicted his verbal approval of his wife's friends. Despite their friend's absence and their grumbling, the women enjoyed their evening together.

A few days later, I met the absent friend in town. She explained that her husband had not stopped her from coming, but that she had done so herself. Her father-in-law was visiting

from home and staying at the house at the time. She said that to have gone out dancing with her friends that evening would have shown lack of "respect". She did not complain, saying it was inevitable and important for her to show respect for the *kastom* values that her relationship with her father-in-law entailed. Normally she was happy to go to Sundowners or the casinos, and openly discussed and valued the freedom that she said her husband gave to her. For her there was no contradiction between her professed freedom and her need to stay at her house that night. It was normal that on certain occasions rules of *kastom* must be adhered to, as respect is often cited as a fundamental aspect of *kastom*. When her friends had thought that her husband stopped her from coming, they were annoyed. But when they heard her explanation, they accepted her own non-attendance without qualm. In this way, the power relations inherent in household organisation make themselves felt in decisions about public socialising. Importantly, everybody I spoke to viewed the woman's acquiescence to her household situation as both natural and responsible, and held that she was correct not to resist her obligation to stay at the house.

The politics of June's trousers

The woman who did not attend Sundowners because of her father-in-law's presence at her house was happy to show respect, which she claimed was adherence to *kastom*. When women find themselves constrained by people to whom they are not related, or are only tenuously linked to their households, then they are more likely to resist such constraints. However, in order to avoid offence and conflict, they may carefully disguise their resistance. In Chapter 4, I touched on how urbanites refer to clothing to distinguish between people who are *lokol* and those who are *moden*. A core feature of Sundowners is that it is the realm of *moden* women, and they say that clothing worn there acts as testament to this.

June was unusual in some ways compared to many of her friends and relatives. She had a good job, and claimed that her husband always allowed her to attend Sundowners and other night-clubs. June drank, smoked, danced and clearly enjoyed her nights out. She said she went to Sundowners every month, and looked at home with the crowd as she sang and laughed. However, in many ways she was not exceptional: her marriage had been through severe difficulties, she had moved house several times, and her behaviour caused tensions with the neighbours, whom she complained were *lokol*. Tensions became intensified over her predilection for wearing trousers rather than skirts. Her neighbours' gossip irritated her so much that she, laughingly, explained how she had taken to wearing a *lavalava* (fabric wrap) over her trousers when she left the house, only removing it once she had reached the safety of a friend's house. Although June's favoured trousers were long and loose, many people

argue that woman and girls should not wear any sort of trousers. They say that this contradicts *kastom* norms that indicate that only men should wear trousers, because they over-emphasise a woman's shape and therefore sexuality. For June, wearing trousers indicated to herself and the world that she had left many of her "home" (*hom*) ways behind. She said that she was "modern" (*moden*): that she was free to drink, smoke and wear trousers if she wished. To her, the veneer of modernity was important, she explained that it indicated a deeper set of attitudes, for instance, a certain degree of equality between men and women. She added that her husband did not tell her what to do, but that they acted as "equals".[12]

In addition, June explained that she had tried to join the women's group of the church to which she belonged, but found that they rejected her because she did *moden* things such as drink and go to night-clubs. She was clear that the women did not throw her out, but drove her away through their malicious gossip. At Sundowners, she talked of how her neighbours did not understand her *moden* ways, because they were uneducated and from the village. She dealt with the pressure of their upsetting gossip by wearing the *lavalava*, and said that it stopped them talking about her too much. However, she saw this as an act of defiance rather than submission, which confirmed her status as a *moden* urban woman. June added that wearing the *lavalava* served to diffuse any potential conflict, and that she planned to discuss the issue with her neighbours. She had encountered similar problems before, and maintained that a quiet talk could lessen malicious gossip: in the past she had told people to mind their own business. She said that she felt uncomfortable in doing this before, but because her neighbours were not related to her, and because she saw them as unsophisticated *lokol* people, she felt able to do so.

For women, attending the Sundowners Club shows that they have attained a certain status: much of this is to do with the fact that they see the event as an example of foreign practices. The regular presence of a few expatriates confirms this for them. The alcohol and pop music are provided for them, but is they who provide the attitude and the sociability which makes the event a resounding success. Above all, unlike the casinos, women see Sundowners as fun. However, it is a very particular kind or fun, which is risqué to a certain extent, but also protects women because of the feminine environment, the early closing time, and the sale of half measures at the bar (even though most women buy double measures).

Men's reactions to Sundowners are mixed. I have already mentioned that some may prevent their wives from attending, and others collect them at closing time. Those who do allow their wives to attend say that they are happy to give their wives that freedom. They say

[12] See Chapter 2 where I describe urbanites' definition of successful marriages relying on good communication and understanding, which entails a degree of equality between spouses.

that they "trust" their wives in such an environment; and that their wives are not *lokol* girls, but are mature, urban women who are able to conduct themselves properly and not bring shame to themselves or their families. As such, their wives' ability to behave properly reflects men's sophistication too. It is important to men that an air of privacy surrounds Sundowners, as they that it prevents shame. In addition to the risk of infidelity, many men say that other mixed gender clubs are inappropriate for their wives because of their visibility to men, and to unmarried relatives who may gossip about them.

In these ways, women who go to Sundowners balance precariously on a fine line between morality and immorality. In order to attend they must be reasonably affluent, and as such they are a minority among women in town. While they enjoy the freedom that they say the event brings to them, their entire evening is tempered by an awareness that they are behaving in a risqué fashion. For example, they are collected by their husbands, and keep their nights out secret from disapproving colleagues, neighbours or kin. The fact that they are happy to curtail their involvement in Sundowners if necessary, and will disguise many of their activities to avoid conflict, displays their awareness of the fragility of their freedom to participate, as well as the ground-breaking nature of their behaviour.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have described how Honiarans see their involvement in casinos as simultaneously "work" and "play", but say that the main aim of Sundowners is pure enjoyment. It is worth mentioning that in the same way that the churches preach against casinos, they also condemn night-clubs and drinking and claim that such activities do violence to family values. For example, in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I mentioned how night-clubs are often linked to accusations of infidelity and concomitant domestic violence, whereas in this chapter, I showed how adoption of certain norms at Sundowners brought it into line with *kastom* enough to placate all but the most *lokol* of people. June's decisions to hide her trousers under a *lavalava* highlighted the manner in which Honiarans mould their behaviour to avoid offence. She laughed about her strategy in such a way that she seemed to conceptualise her acquiescence to her *lokol* neighbours as a subtle form of resistance, which both avoided conflict and maintained her own sense of being "modern".

This section has shown how, unlike in domestic settings, ethnicity does not cause many problems for middle class Honiarans people in public spheres. Success for urbanites in public arenas involves pushing ethnic differences to the background, in their attempts at conviviality. But this is not necessarily a matter of hybridisation, rather it is a case that private emphasis on ethnicity is masked by silence. When, however, it does become

important—such as in the operation of the *wantok sistem* at schools, or church attempts to mobilise their congregations by dividing them along ethnic lines—there is widespread discontent about such emphasis on ethnicity in public arenas, as urbanites feel that ethnic divisions are inappropriate in their public milieu. This discontent is essentially turned against the institutions that nurture it, as urbanites use the *wantok sistem* and demands of the church as rationale to privilege individual and household desires above those of wider kin groups or institutions. In this chapter, I described how instead of ethnicity being central, contested generic urban morality is the main cause for concern. In these ways, Honiara's schools, churches, casinos and night-clubs are arenas where individuals gently negotiate the constraints and freedom of urban life to consolidate their urban success.

Honiarans claim that they are free within these "modern" contexts, but acknowledge that they are nonetheless enmeshed in the values of church and home and tied to their households. In this way, the construct "feeling free" entails, rather than competes with, such constraints. Even in these most individual of spheres, decisions about participation are defined by these voices, such that affluent Honiarans' distance from home, their identification with one another as a discrete class, and their orientation towards individuals and households as nuclear families are partial and complex.

Conclusion

Eight days in 1998: celebrating diversity, enhancing disaffection

In July 1998, Honiara hosted events to mark the Solomon Islands' 20th anniversary of independence. Celebrations spanned eight days, as the government had organised the annual National Trade and Cultural show and the inaugural Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival to coincide with the anniversary. The National Trade and Cultural Show at King George VI School grounds comprised display stalls from commercial companies and NGO's operating in the country, alongside food and handicraft stalls. On a stage to one side of the grounds, rock, gospel and reggae musicians played, interspersed by dancing by "cultural performers". The Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival was based at a specially constructed "festival village" near the National Art Gallery in the centre of town. For five days, "cultural groups" from the four other member countries of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)[1] performed there, while the Solomon Islands was represented by a group from each of its provinces. The anniversary of independence itself—7th July—fell on the Tuesday during both of these events. Anniversary festivities included parades, speeches and presentations of awards, exchanges of gifts between dignitaries and a "Prime Minister's Feast" for invited guests. For eight days, Honiara buzzed with unsurpassed activity, which my informants soon began to describe as simultaneously exciting and irksome.

In their construction of the anniversary events, the ruling elite organised performances, which involved reifications of ethnicity and *kastom* in an overt attempt to further a sense of national unity. Each province was represented by a single "*kastom* dance" group from a particular ethnic group, each group was deemed to represent the other ethnic groups in their province, amid claims that there were significant similarities between ethnic groups from a single province. Through this process, members of the elite were encouraging Solomon Islanders to accept the ethnic diversity of the country in a manner reminiscent of elite attempts in many multi-ethnic nations, not least neighbouring Papua New Guinea.[2] However, while the elite orchestrated performances of ethnic diversity, Honiara's middle class met these with concern. The national events provoked more discord than harmony because they conflicted with two central elements of middle class life-styles. First, the events

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[1] The Melanesian Spearhead Group consists of 5 member countries: Solomon Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. It was largely established to promote trade between the member countries, and also attempts to create broader political and "cultural" union.

[2] On elite attempts to inculcate national sentiment see Foster (1991), and—more specifically—on the emergence of nationhood in Melanesia, see Foster's edited collection (1995*a*).

seemed to concretise disparities in economic and political power, which mean that the middle classes will never become elite, despite their aspirations. LiPuma and Melzhoff (1990)[3] describe how the 10th anniversary of independence celebrations in 1988 disguised increasing class differentiation: "the enormous stress that the independence celebration placed on overcoming regional and ethnic divisions tends to mask its contribution to the creation of a new form of social division founded on wealth, education, international political status ... command of English, and whatever capitalism demands" (1990: 88). In 1998, members of the middle class seemed acutely aware that the events highlighted social divisions, and their disaffection was partly based on their sense of exclusion from the avenues of significant wealth and power. Second, they exacerbated the ethnic differences that middle class urbanites usually try to downplay in the public aspects of their everyday lives. While the elite were essentially imploring their citizens to maintain *kastom*, throughout this thesis, I have shown how the middle class are less interested in retaining *kastom* than they are in aspiring to modernity. In this way, elite attempts to emphasise *kastom* bore little resemblance to the aspirations of the middle class, and seemed incongruous and possibly threatening to delicate middle class social order.

Over eight days, middle class responses to the events heightened two themes: their sense of peripherality to real wealth and power; and the ethnic tensions exacerbated by the *kastom* performances.

Inequalities of economics and power

The anniversary of independence celebrations on 7th July 1998 drew large crowds to Lawson Tama sports stadium to witness parades and speeches. After the pageantry, dignitaries and recipients of awards made their way to the grounds of the National Art Gallery for the "Prime Minister's Feast". Meanwhile, the rest of the onlookers milled around town or made their way back to their houses. Only a few hundred people were fortunate enough to attend the feast by virtue of their jobs, spouses' jobs, or receipt of awards. The feast proved to be key to concretising the division of Solomon Islanders into the elite and those who were less affluent or influential at a national level.

Many of the Honiarans, who did not attend, grumbled about the expense of the feast. They stood near the entrance and watched bearers carry in laden baskets of food. Both urbanites and visitors complained about having to fend for themselves amidst Honiara's heat,

[3] See also Feinberg (1990) for a discussion of the 10th anniversary of independence celebrations in Honiara. His informants also expressed disgruntlement about the amount of money spent by the elite on celebratory events, which he—briefly—links to emerging class divisions.

dust, and expensive food stalls. Of those who were invited, some felt at ease, others intimidated: a difference that seemed to depend on how often they had attended official "functions" in the past, reflecting their involvement with the national elite. For example, the wife of a prominent civil servant put on her finest clothes and revelled in the feasts' international atmosphere. She laughingly described how she had led the dancing with a foreign dignitary, in order to encourage everyone else to take part. On the other hand, a woman with more humble pretensions who was also at the feast by virtue of her husband's job, explained that she had felt "ashamed" (*sem*) because there were "over 200" people there, with many "big men". She added that she was not used to such events, and had felt out of place and somewhat inadequate. She had only felt relaxed when she realised that some of her friends were there after all, so that she had someone to chat with. These feelings about the feast were echoed in a newspaper article on the opening of the Arts and Cultural Festival at the festival village. It reported large crowds pressing to get into the village compound, and a "middle-aged couple" shouting out in frustration: "why is it that ordinary people were not allowed into the official opening of the festival, it seems to be big people all the time" (*Solomon Star* 8 July 1998 #1190: 8).

Such reactions reflect concerns about money and segregation. At the feast, while the nation's elite enjoyed a sumptuous shared meal, those who were excluded expressed their disaffection by focusing on the cost of the event. As I have discussed previously, eating together is important element of sociability and forges cohesion within groups in Honiara and throughout the Solomon Islands. Equally though, especially when in combination with economic inequalities, commensality can restate difference. The feast reinforced the emergence of the elite community, making everyone else all too aware of their exclusion from privilege. The feast illustrated the division between the elite and the middle class. However, the situation of the woman who was ill-at-ease until she realised that some of her friends were there shows that boundaries between the two groups are not necessarily clear-cut, and are rooted in forms of sociability. The feast conjured up disaffection, but also invoked the contrast between middle class aspirations to be like the elite, and their discomfort and inability to join in when offered the opportunity.

"traditional custome":[4] Problems with reifications of *kastom*

For five days, the organisers of the Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival were busy displaying "culture". These displays rested on elite conceptions of culture in need of preservation from the advancing hoards of foreign influence: a view expressed by the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs, Leslie Boseto, at the opening ceremony on 6th July 1998:

> These are our identities and values. The generation of tomorrow may lose them if national government do nothing to recognise our place in a contemporary society. Foreign influences would undermine our identities and values if we do nothing to sustain them.

While Boseto's comments indicate elite concerns to preserve *kastom*, Honiarans held that some of the displays of Solomon Island *kastom* were both incorrect and inappropriate. Furthermore, very few affluent Honiarans want to remove themselves from foreign influence. At several points, I have discussed how clothing is often a focus for debates about moral probity and adherence to *kastom*. I have shown how clothing acts as a powerful expression and reaffirmation of Honiarans' status as sophisticated urbanites rather than as *lokol* people. This is cross-cut by ideas about how a morally upstanding person should dress in accordance with *kastom* that incorporates Christian values. Most Honiarans say that women should conceal their lower bodies, from the waist to just above the knee, although interpretation of this may range from trousers for sophisticated urbanites to several layers of skirts for some rural people. Equally, men should conceal themselves with long shorts. By flouting these norms, the attire of a cultural performance group from one particular province sparked heated debate about appropriate representation of that ethnic group—both to themselves and to outsiders—and about the constitution of *kastom* itself.

Both men and women in the group in question were bare-chested and wore *kubolata*: loin-cloths made of bark cloth (*tapa*). While their bare chests did not cause any problems, the scanty *kubolata* caused much consternation among observers. Discussions were especially obvious and heated among the middle class, and centred on the argument that such scanty clothing was definitely not in accordance with *kastom*, and by implication represented members of the ethnic group in question as less than sexually moral.

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[4] In the *Solomon Star* (10 July 1998 #1191: 11), the caption underneath a photograph of Valentine Wale in *kastom* clothing read: "Chairman of Melanesian Festival of Arts Valentine Wale dress in traditional custome [sic] at the opening on Monday."

Responses included crowd members shouting "*Iufala go nao!*" ("You people should go now!") during the group's performances; laughter when photographers took pictures of the group; and discussions behind the closed doors of Honiara's households. Outrage was not confined to members of the ethnic group in question, people from other provinces also complained that the group presented an image of themselves and of all Solomon Islanders that was a misrepresentation of "true" (*tru*) *kastom*. However, they met the scanty clothing of groups from other MSG countries with humour, and commented that their attire was acceptable because it was "*kastom blo olketa*" ("their *kastom*"). Nobody in Honiara claimed knowledge—for instance, of men from Vanuatu wearing penis gourds—as anything other than their *tru kastom*. However, as the group wearing *kubolata* was from within the Solomon Islands, middle class Honiarans felt that they knew what correct *kastom* attire should be, especially as most of them personally knew somebody from that ethnic group.

In one instance, a woman from another ethnic group who was married to a man from the offending province explained that her husband's relatives had complained about the costumes. They had said that the *kubolata* were not *kastom*, that they were *ovarem* ("exaggerating") *kastom*, and that a "true" *kastom* outfit should include a longer cloth hanging at the front and back, leaving only the very sides of the legs exposed. She added that her affines had said that even though the dancers were from a different area of the province, *kastom* clothing was the same throughout the province, so that they could be sure they were correct. The woman compared the costumes to the skimpy, skin-tight outfits of *Oz Style Aerobics*, which Solomon Telekom was beaming by satellite to televisions in Honiara during the World Cup soccer tournament. As comments about *Oz Style Aerobics* outfits centred on the loose sexual mores of Australians, she was implying that the skimpy *kubolata* cast the people from the province in a similar light. In this way, the debate about whether the *kubolata* were true *kastom* or not was greatly influenced by a desire not to be seen as immoral.

Importantly, it was the cosmopolitan nature of the middle class urbanites' milieu that enabled them to claim knowledge of the *kastom* of many ethnic groups. Although discussion about clothing is common, their consternation about the *kubolata* brought up issues generally subsumed or repressed in the smoother—although not easy—negotiations of everyday life. While such debates are common behind the closed doors of households and among close friends, discussion about *kubolata* occurred in the open, and by doing so promoted discord. In this way, the events echo Handelman's claim that public events are "forms that select out, concentrate, and interrelate themes of existence—lived and imagined—that are more diffused, dissipated and obscured in the everyday" (1990: 15-16).

The events surrounding the 20th anniversary of independence restated and reinforced multiple layers of group cohesion: Melanesian, national and ethnic. By doing so, they also restated layers of difference: between Melanesians and the rest of the world; between Solomon Islanders and people from other Melanesian countries; and between (provincially constructed) ethnic groups within the Solomon Islands. As an unintended consequence, class differences were afforded new clarity through middle class disenchantment with elite reifications of *kastom*, and through their awareness of their exclusion from privilege. Simultaneously, debates about the constitution of "true" (*tru*) *kastom* showed that unity was not a simple matter, but that the events precipitated disagreement about unity and enhanced discord rather than the harmony that their organisers had aimed for. The elite privileged groups made overt use of *kastom* in an attempt to promote nationhood, and thereby—obliquely—their status as leaders of the nation.[5] In their valorisation of *kastom*, the elite were similar to the rural people whom I have described throughout the thesis, but the elites' expression of power served to inculcate disenchantment and mild resistance among the middle class.

Concluding remarks: middle class "freedom" as constrained

This thesis has concerned itself with the formation of urban, middle class society. I have demonstrated how in the minutiae of quotidian life, white-collar workers and their families have removed themselves from attachment with rural life-styles and recreated themselves as a discrete group in an ethnically plural setting. Through this, they are engaged in self-consciously making a new group identity, which emphasises households and connections with members of different ethnic groups, and are at a cross-roads of self-wrought change. They combine selected values and practices of foreign life-styles with some of those generally associated with *kastom*. Importantly then, they neither reject nor accept *kastom* or foreign values and practices wholesale, and employ some of their elements in order to reject or negate others. For example, urbanites portray formal gatherings as based on the *kastom* values of commensality and hospitality, but by only inviting certain kin and by including friends, they reject the importance of *kastom* ties with kin. Such middle class urbanites refer to this complex articulation of *kastom* with the foreign as "modern" (*moden*) which they cast in opposition to *lokol* ("local") forms.

I have focused on forms of sociability as the cornerstone of these processes. This means that those who are engaged in producing and practicing *moden* life-styles form

[5] See Chapter 1, and Babadazan (1988), Hua'ofa (1987) and Keesing (1996) for confirmation of Pacific elite's manipulation of *kastom* to further their own political authority.

enduring sociable relationships with one another, and it is these relationships that lend them the status of a discrete group. This neither precludes entry into this group, nor removal from it. However, there is a strong degree of cohesion between Honiarans who share similar aspirations to be *moden*.

While I have relied heavily on explaining the emergence of the middle class according to their quotidian practices, of course broader political and economic forces inform their actions. The emerging unity of the middle class exists only by virtue of economic and political differences, between the middle class and those whom they define as *lokol*, and between the middle class and the members of the elite, who rule the country.

My involvement with a network of affluent urban households provided a view of middle class life, and their concern to become modern, urban, and cosmopolitan. Their concern to achieve this status is constantly interwoven with concern to avoid offence: to be "quiet". Quietness is the quality of a morally upright person, which is constantly in-play with attempts to find "freedom" in an ethnically plural urban milieu.

Honiarans' discussions and employment of ethnicity in private spheres show that ethnicity was a salient device, which they particularly use to assess moral probity. Their constructions of ethnicity are particularly immutable: such that a persons ethnicity is a given. However, this does not mean that it is not augmented: naming and feeding practices are central devices for imbuing identity. Furthermore, ethnic identity is intersected by attempts to become cosmopolitan. For example, affluent well-educated Honiarans are comfortable and adept at negotiating inter-ethnic marriages: a far cry from their ancestors. While inter-ethnic marriage is not a new phenomenon, there has been a dramatic increase in its incidence in recent years, and some groups—such as Tikopians—no longer try to ban their children from forming relationships with members of other ethnic groups.

Within urban households, ethnicity is constantly negotiated alongside attempts to establish discrete nuclear families and households, which are often at odds with the demands of rural kin. However, such negotiations are by no means simple, as Honiarans express regret at their self-imposed distance from *kastom* and home, yet revel in the material goods and visible status that their positions in town provide.

The dynamic between freedom and gaze is encapsulated by the discourse and reality of "creeping", and the fact that women must not travel around town on their own. The reasons for this are twofold: they fear attack and malicious gossip, particularly about their sexual conduct. On the other hand, entire households move across town, and form relatively stable social networks out of their fragile households. During birthday parties and fund-raising events at houses, forms of appropriate sociability are standardised, such that distance

from rural relatives is reinforced. Even on their visits home, urbanites continue their attempts to distance themselves from their rural kin, and many claim a sense of alienation from and incompetence in life-styles at home.

While households reinforce their independence *and* interconnections through formal events, individuals can also break away from households in order to visit one another. Women must visit each another during daylight, and never alone, but men feel able to visit at night. Importantly, such visits strengthen individual friendships, which seem at odds to relationships between affluent and less affluent kin. Material goods and food become especially important as urban kin lavish extravagant, often monetary, gifts on their rural kin, but exchange small, luxury items with each another. As in decisions about spouses, I suggested that morality is key to understanding evaluations of town. Urbanites claim that ethnicity is linked to moral conduct, but add that life-styles in town are no less moral than at home. Thus, they say that people behave as they do in town because of their ethnicity, not because of their place of residence. On the other hand, their rural relatives claim that town is so morally dubious that they can barely understand why anyone would choose to stay there.

Independence from home is further concretised in workplaces and recreational sites. But it is here that the tensions between urban and rural life-styles are thrown into particularly sharp relief. Furthermore, the twin forces of church and *kastom* sometimes conflict with the aspirations of the urban middle class, and can paradoxically encourage urbanites' orientation towards themselves and their households. This is especially the case where ethnicity is concerned, as urbanites reject emphasis on ethnicity in these arenas. However, as ethnicity is extremely important behind closed doors of households, this is not to say that public practices are hybrid forms. Instead, ethnic differences—which are strongly upheld but negotiated in private—are downplayed and pushed into the background amid Honiarans' attempts to accumulate prestige, finance and independence for themselves and their discrete households.

The fragile harmony established by urbanites' efforts to push ethnic difference into the background was unbalanced during the anniversary of independence celebrations. At the celebrations, the elite portrayed the country as made up of discrete ethnic groups, a state of affairs more usually pushed aside by the middle class in public settings. It seems that the more public a setting is, the less likely the middle class are to discuss ethnicity openly: they become "quiet" on the subject. Against a backdrop of potential for extreme inter-ethnic conflict—which *has* erupted since my fieldwork—middle class urbanites acknowledge ethnic differences in private but tend to downplay them in public. This seems a sensible precaution, which helps them to avoid discord and maintain their success as cosmopolitan

urbanites. In this way, while *kastom* practices that Honiarans claim are ethnically specific, are interchanged and adapted—in what might be termed hybridisation—this must be understood as occurring in a dynamic with ongoing (and often tacit) ethnification. Furthermore, what appear to be "hybrid" forms, may well be little other than (self-conscious) protective disguise.

Although affluent Honiarans are careful to maintain comfortable life-styles and stabilise their connections with one another, I have also discussed Honiarans' ambivalence about their self-made identities. They often describe their situations by wryly using the *Pijin* phrase "*fil fri*" ("to feel free" *or* "feeling free"). This encapsulates the dialectic between their relative freedom in town and the fact that such freedom is often constrained by the demands, obligations and values of ethnicity, kinship, *kastom* and life at "home". In this way, their aspirations to secure cosmopolitan "town" life-styles, which make them middle class, are in a delicate balance with a degree of ongoing attachment to home. Their ability to secure such life-styles is also nuanced by the practices and privilege of the urban elite: the "big men" who block access to real political and economic power, and who patronise their citizens by imploring them to follow *kastom*. As Hau'ofa has pointed out: "It is the privileged who can afford to tell the poor to preserve their traditions" (1987: 4). However, in the light of the extreme tensions of 1999, the delicate balance that constitutes middle class life in Honiara may well prove momentary.

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